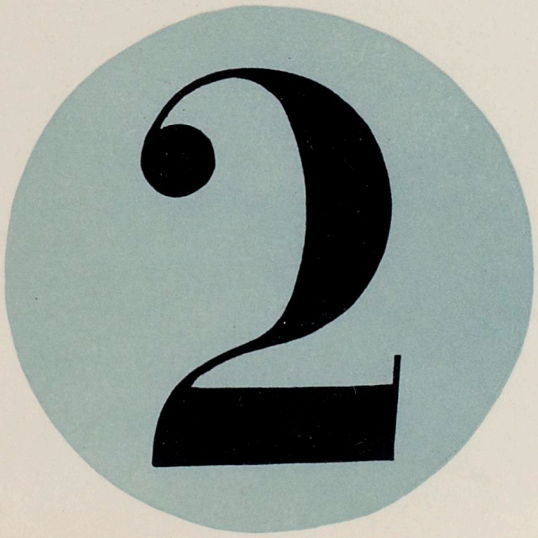
April 1935

AXIS

A QUARTERLY REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY "ABSTRACT" PAINTING & SCULPTURE

Editor: Myfanwy Evans



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● subjects

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Kandinsky
Ben Nicholson
Sir Michael Sadler's Collection
Paul Klee
Exhibitions in London, Paris, Lucerne.
Book reviews, etc.

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The THIRD NUMBER of AXIS (to appear in July) will be concerned chiefly with contemporary sculpture, and will include illustrated articles on the work of BRANCUSI, MOORE, CALDER and HEPWORTH.

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The lay-out of AXIS Nos. 1 and 2 by John Piper.

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PICASSO. Head. (1926.) (Courtesy of A. Zwemmer)

BEGINNING WITH PICASSO

Picasso looks at a wineglass for the sun, a guitar for the moon, a table for the whole universe. He never gets away from the object, but through it. The object is not a symbol for anything, it is everything. Whether he paints one line or five, draws cross-sections, plans and elevations, makes part upright and part flat, or analyses to the simplest single shape, the object radiates out to the world and becomes the world. That is the whole point of a wineglass and a guitar and a table to Picasso ; and it is the whole point of the cubist movement—a lyrical movement which made one familiar thing every familiar thing.

* * * * * * *

And if you realise Picasso's pictures, any one of them will become the whole world when you look at it. This is true of a large still-life or a small head or a drawing or a *collage*. Picasso's *collages* are casually analytical—pinned together and impermanent. Each object is all there, spread out in paper and line quite unimportantly, but realised with such distinction that it expands until it represents much more than itself. The large still-life paintings stand for no more than the *collages*, though they are grander and more surprising ; different in occasion, not in nature.

* * * * * * *

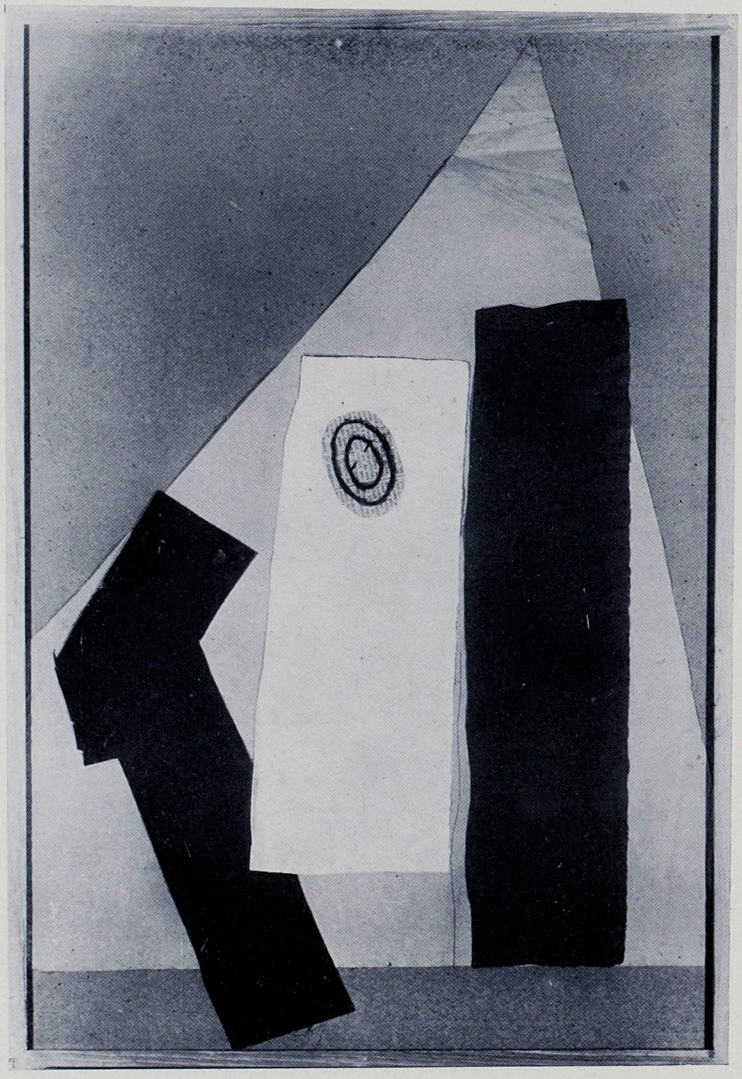
An opposite of Picasso's attitude is to reach out for remote suns and stars, to try and bring them down into one place, one picture—still preserving their remoteness. To work from the outside inwards is to work from an assumed distance and horizon, so that the picture embraces a preconceived universe and a preconceived God. Instead of representing a familiar thing in such a way that there is no limit to what it can mean, it represents an unfamiliar thing in a strictly limited way. The object is no longer the world-object of the cubists, it is a symbol.

* * * * * * *

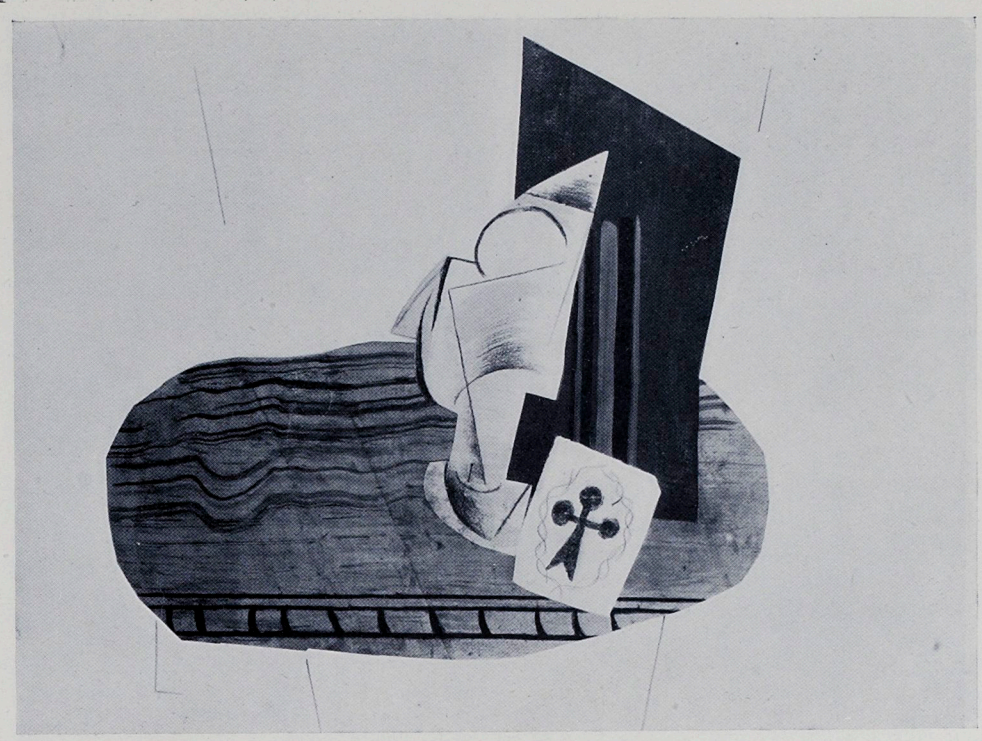
An object *can* be nothing but itself, existing in a clear, everyday light with space round it. A square, for instance. A square realised as an object can be used in a picture to make a definite statement, depending on the particular way it is used for its vigour—not on the convictions or associations of those who look at it. This is a fine base to build on, and one that will bear structural elaboration. It allows the use of forms which are subtle because they signify life without suggesting or recalling it. Forms that exist and are used so positively that they can only be part of a very real world.

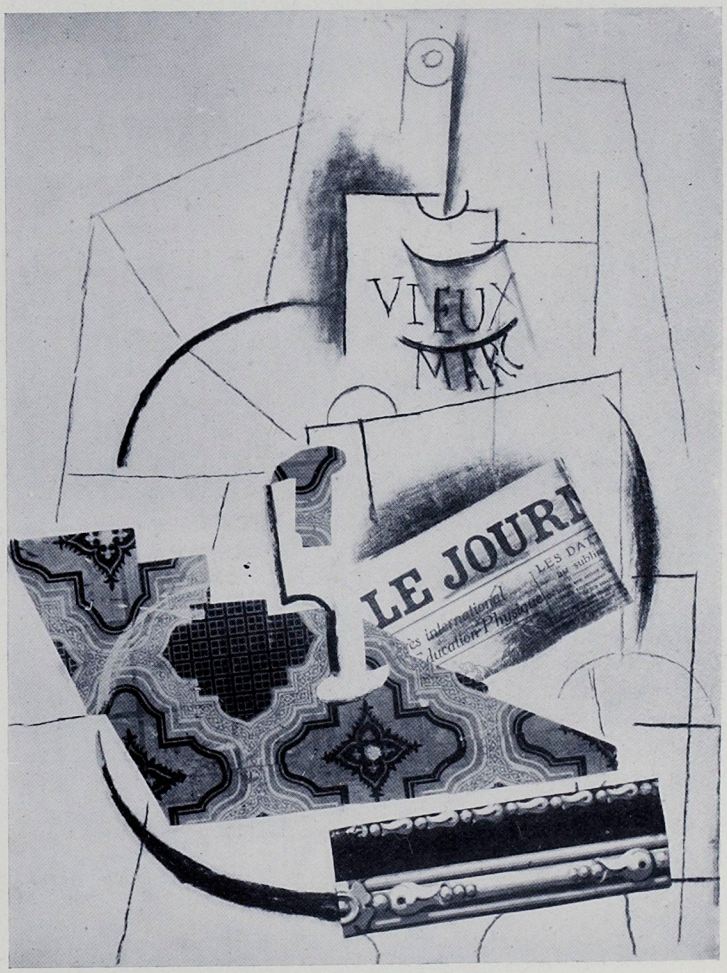
MYFANWY EVANS.

The papiers collés reproduced on these two pages were shown at the Galerie Pierre during March, 1935. This show was exclusively devoted to Picasso's *papiers collés*, 1912–14. The Braque still life on page 31 was exhibited during March and April at the exhibition in Paris, " Les Créateurs du Cubisme." This was a representative exhibition showing works from the beginning of the movement to the present day. It was arranged by the *Beaux-Arts* and *La Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. Picasso, Braque and Léger were all excellently represented.

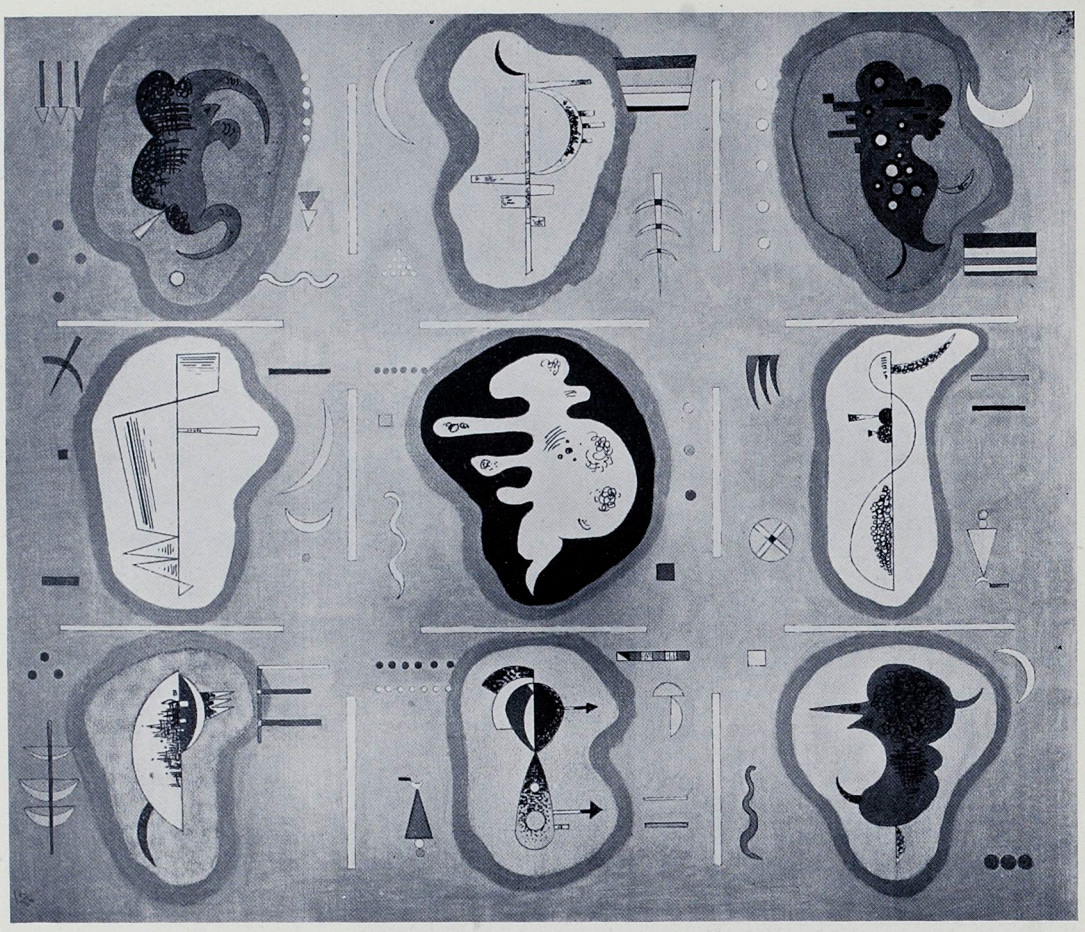


PICASSO. Papier Collé. 1914





PICASSO. Papiers Collés. 1914



KANDINSKY. *Chaqun pour soi.* 1934. (70/60 cm.)

LINE AND FISH

Approaching it in one way I see no essential difference between a line one calls " abstiact " and a fish.

But an essential likeness.

This isolated line and the isolated fish alike are living beings with forces peculiar to them, though latent. They are forces of expression for these beings and of impression on human beings. Because each being has an impressive " look " which manifests itself by its expression.

But the voice of these latent forces is faint and limited. It is the environment of the line and the fish that brings about a miracle : the latent forces awaken, the expression becomes radiant, the impression profound. Instead of a low voice one hears a choir. The latent forces have become dynamic.

The environment is the composition.

The composition is the *organized* sum of the *interior* functions (expressions) of every part of the work.

But approaching it in another way there is an essential difference between a line and a fish.

And that is that the fish can swim, eat and be eaten. It has then capacities of which the line is deprived.

These capacities of the fish are necessary extras for the fish itself and for the kitchen, but not for painting. And so not being necessary, they are superfluous.

That is why I like the line better than the fish—at least in my painting.

KANDINSKY.
Paris. March, 1935.

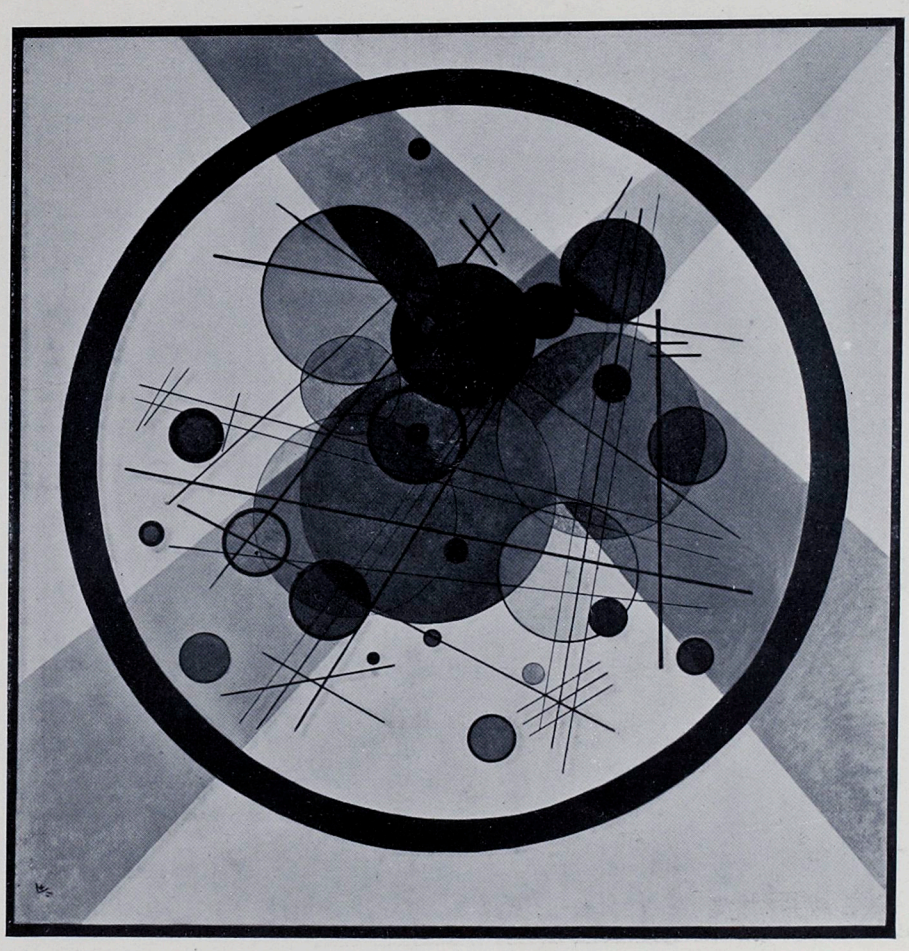
KANDINSKY'S VISION

In sophisticated people vision is what the eye doesn't see. What the mind, the inner eye, the heart sees is their spiritual light. But Kandinsky's eyes are his vision—he allows them their full physical and spiritual discernment, and puts no other senses, no habits of mind, conventions or intellectual judgments between them and a pure enjoyment of colour and line. By using only his eyes he limits himself, takes only a part of the world, instead of abstracting the essence of the whole world. But by the intensity with which he uses them, by the way he makes them absorb all functions of soul and sense, he makes his limitation a boundless glory.

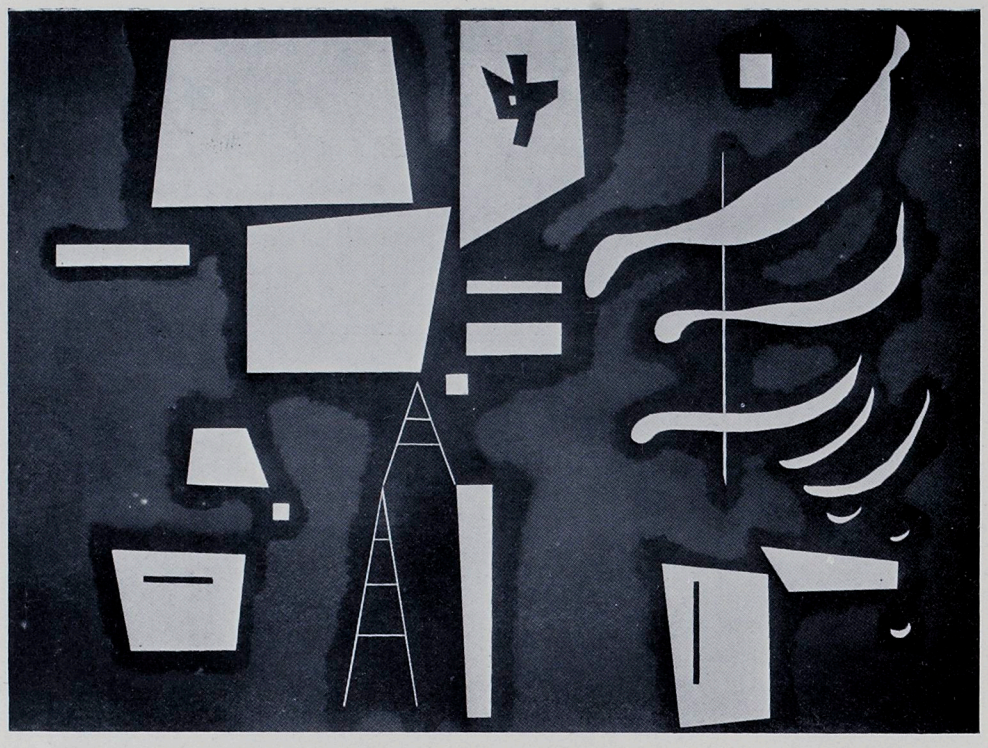
And when I look at Kandinsky's pictures I have to allow my eyes this licence too. There is nothing to comfort the spirit, as there is in some sanitary painting to-day; no good taste, it is not needed—good taste is what a compromise between soul, sense and habit produces; nothing to tickle the intellect, and allow it to coerce the eye into approval of recherché relations; and so I can only judge by the immediate reaction of my sight.

It is a pity the reproductions are only half-tones, because it means that only half the pictures are here, a half that the intellect could easily examine and judge. It could trace oriental influences, notice the careful composition, elaborate juxtaposition of circle and circle, square and square, line and blob. But imagine all these shapes seduced from mere relationships and tossed into a dry, excitable atmosphere of firework colours—and the intellect powders in the clear air. In colour you see the whole or nothing, and the eye shines with a spiritual as well as physical warmth and brilliance.

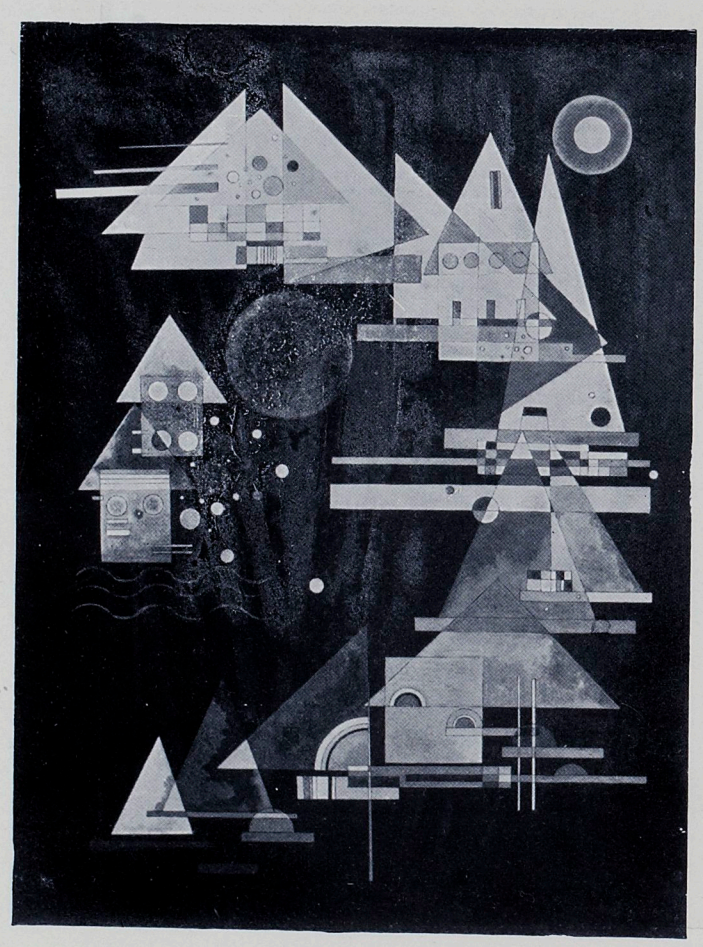
MYFANWY EVANS



KANDINSKY.
Circles in a circle.
1923.
(95/97 cm.)



KANDINSKY.
White, soft and hard.
1932.
(100 / 80 cm.)



KANDINSKY.
Points and curves.
1929.
(49 / 66 cm.)

KANDINSKY.
Water-colour.
(Coll. Sir Michael Sadler.)

WASSILY KANDINSKY

A vast landscape open to every delight and every wind—cleared lands, yellow, red and green, rising to meet the assault of the sky and its lights—such is the image of the old Russia which can be read in the first pictures of Kandinsky.

From the first his genius anticipates and foretells the destiny of our civilisation, the clash of two worlds, which is to happen later. Of two lives rather, before and after the *fait accompli* of the industrial revolution, representing those two antagonistic forces which determined the appearance of the phenomenon of " Modern Art."

The large town with its factories invades the countryside, abruptly changing its aspect, its psychology, its vision. A whole gamut of colours which once graced peasant-work, work made with human hands, so lyrical, so individual and unique, is from this moment condemned to disappear, menaced by the mass-produced article. And this persistent inertia, this legendary " firebird " which nests and finds a home in every toy of this country, prostrates its gorgeous wings, ready to fly away for ever.

On the æsthetic plane this conflict manifests itself from the very first in the agony of the conception of landscape—in the extra-subjective deformation of that which used to be looked on as unchangeable, through the window of Corot's eternal Sunday. His idyllic, and above all static, open air symbolised the well-being of the society in which he lived ; of that well-ripened society which approaches the beginning of its own decadence. This last begins with Impressionism—with the transitional style which has merely undermined the old beauty without putting another in its place. They, the townsmen, open-air tourists, no longer come except to glance at its ruins. In fact, the landscape conception is decaying

everywhere ; following different rhythms and speeds and thus representing very different ideologies.

Kandinsky's landscape exalts the solar eruption.

German expressionism which he engenders later, and which borrows from Kandinsky the form and not the content, is to exalt the earthquake shocks of the small towns ; their pale, convulsive, colourless population thrown at random into a life which begins at midnight.

French " fauvism," on the other hand, is to transform the landscape more lengthily, more slowly, bringing it at last to an arabesque (Matisse) to a painted paper—nature at home—*nature morte*. The logical outcome, moreover, of this art which only considers the object and what is left of the object. Italian futurism begins otherwise, more directly. By the blind apotheosis of the machine and industry. But neither that nor German expressionism have had time to create a stable and durable art, which demands either a slow tradition or the powerful biological force of an ascendant race.

Western man decimated in the course of progressive rationalisation, which deprives him of direct contact with nature, no longer touches the sun ; he ceases to be a complete man. He becomes a unilateral specialist in his occupations as well as in his psychological constitution. He poses the problem without being able to give it life, without resolving it. He can no longer resolve the unity of his world, nor the problems of his existence. His last painter being Courbet ; his last writer Zola. *Les Funerailles d'Ornans* and the description of the cemetery of Plasans which inaugurates the career of the Rougon-Macquarts are his final *chefs-d'œuvre*.

Then, to infuse blood into the conflict, to create pictures which would reflect æsthetically the changing of cultures and which would be its plastic expression, it needed a Russian and a Spaniard, Picasso and Kandinsky—the two precursors, the two founders of the art to come.

In the year 1911 Kandinsky painted the first abstract picture at Munich, at precisely the moment when Picasso in Paris, during his " analytical cubist " period, came close to the

KANDINSKY. Composition No. 7, 1913. (300/200 cm.)

same conception. Arriving by diametrically opposed routes. They will never meet again, however.

And so at Munich the second phase of Wassily Kandinsky's work begins—an art integrally abstract. After having left his country, which was not far advanced enough in the problems which presented themselves to him, he definitely settles in Germany, where he occupies exactly the same place as Picasso in Paris ; plays the same part, has the same importance for German art.

Picasso, like the other cubists, achieves the dissection of the object and of nature, replacing them by geometrical forms—Kandinsky, who has never known the object, proposes the direct ascension of new forms, symbolic forms borrowed from technics and machinery. For the cubists the machine is an end (F. Léger)—for Kandinsky the beginning.

By mimetics, by adaptation to environment, certain cubists reduce every form in the human body to the limit of its simplification—the thigh to a factory chimney—Kandinsky tries to fill all geometrical form, primary and simple, with human emotion. And to make them in consequence reach beyond their unique, purely visual, signification. (Just as they read : triangle, circle, square. . . .)

With the cubists, the indefinite tries to approach these exact and invariable data, with Kandinsky precise data are infinitely indefinite.

And so industrial romanticism and romantic industry, dawn and twilight bathed in the same light, find themselves almost an equal distance apart from the dead stop of the type of present-day art which is called pure form—or form without content.

If cubist paintings are speeches, panegyrics and funeral orations, Kandinsky's works are music, nocturnes, elegies, rhapsodies. Neither the one nor the other has anything to do with this glacial and neutral white—the snow-region of painting which posts itself as a natural frontier between them.

Dawn and twilight bathed in the same light, by that delicate and furtive gilding of a mental sun—the beige of the cubists and the Byzantine gold of Kandinsky—*L'Heure du Berger*, the uncertain hour of the epicurean wisdom of the eighteenth century, so refined and so dear to our times, to our twentieth century, one equally of transition, with its shepherdess —the Eiffel Tower—and the morning flock on its bridges.

Here, with Kandinsky's recent settling in Paris, begins the third phase of his art. The element of his creation was always light, or rather the multitude of lights of the different countries where he has lived. As we have already seen, visual lights and the soul's lightning coincide in his work, thus achieving a synthesis of the ideological climates of our time. With him every form, every sign, only exists plunged in a boundless atmosphere, in a shining of the hour. Now suddenly transported to Paris, they encounter the enchantment of dawns, of sunsets—its broad daylight.

The former light—that invisible energy which draws itself out along the length of a line, the length of a thread which remains opaque and black, drawing only a silhouette amongst flowering fields overflowing their boundaries, changes at one blow the aspect of significance, of value. The line is riddled all over with grains of sunlight, multicoloured points of light which penetrate it. The medium even becomes incandescent, full of the light from the window.

The plain backgrounds transform themselves into a mass of moving sand, captivators of attention.

And mechanical elements, rigorously mathematical, give place little by little to very human forms which will be the best expression of this changed sensibility. If he had before an unconscious wish to de-materialize masses, or spiritualize inanimate forms already existing, at once fascinating and hostile, his vision to-day ignores them—it has no longer this basis, this point of departure. The image begins with the first touch of the brush, the first flicker of the eyelid, and crystallizes in the course of the work. The brushstroke, the very substance of the colour, converts itself, separates, prompted by its own life—choosing the purest form. The sight becomes a lever to lift the blue weight of the Parisian sky. Yes, from this came the first tentative efforts of Delacroix to fix the reflection of a reflection, this art of fingering—Chopin's advice to cultivate a free and delicate touch, to let the hand fall onto the clavier freely, lightly, to arrive at last at an indecisive melody like an airy apparition—this romanticism of the nineteenth century which extends itself as far as the ultimate desire of the surrealists, to seize the shadow of a shade—symbolic of a life that is amazed at itself. Old Paris !

Each civilisation, each culture, has its favoured cultural climate, its ideal atmosphere. Rome for the sixteenth century, Versailles for the eighteenth, Paris for the beginning of the twentieth. Kandinsky lives there and his art becomes more highly universalized. His latest painting offers us an unexpected image of Paris—one of the most beautiful effigies of his aerial purpose.

ANATOLE JAKOVSKI.

Works by Kandinsky are to be found in museums and private collections in Germany, England, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Holland, Japan, Italy, Mexico, Norway, Russia, Sweden, Switzerland and the U.S.A.

BOOKS ON KANDINSKY.

1. "Kandinsky," 1901–1913, 75 reproductions and text (autobiography and notes by Kandinsky), 1913, "Der Sturm," Berlin.
2. "Kandinsky," 1902–1916, reproductions and text (autiobiography in Russian), 1919, Moscow.
3. "Kandinsky," by H. Zehder, 1920, Dresden.
4. "W. Kandinsky," by W. Grohmann, in the series "Junge Kunst," 1924, Leipzig.
5. "Wassily Kandinsky," by Grohmann, Editions "Cahiers d'Art" (with *hommages*, biographical notices), 1931, Paris.
6. "Kandinsky," by W. Grohmann, F. Morlion, G. Marlier and *hommages* (biographical notice, bibliography, catalogue of engravings and drawings), No. 14 in the series "Selection," 1933, Antwerp.
7. "Kandinsky" monograph with text by W. Grohmann and Anatole Jakovski, Tenerife, Spain (appearing shortly). Also a large number of articles in books (histories of art, etc.), and art reviews in different countries. Lastly an article on recent work by Chr. Zervos ("Cahiers d'Art, No. 5–8, 1934).

BOOKS BY KANDINSKY.

1. "Ueber das Geistige in der Kunst," 3 editions, Piper & Co., Munich, 1912 and 1913 (O.P.).
2. "The Art of Spiritual Harmony," preface by M. Sadler, Constable & Co., London, 1914.
3. "Der Blaue Reiter," edited by Kandinsky and Franz Marc, Piper & Co., Munich, 1912; 2nd edition, 1916. (O.P.).
4. "Klänge," poems in prose with 56 woodcuts in colour and black and white. Single edition, Piper & Co., Munich, 1913 (O.P.).
5. "Om Konstnaeren," 1916, Gummeson, Stockholm, 1916.
6. "Kleine Welten," 12 original prints (wood, dry-point, lithograph), Propylaeen Verlag, Berlin, 1922.
7. "Punkt und Linie zu Flache," Albert Langen Verlag, Munich, 1923, 2nd edition, 1926.

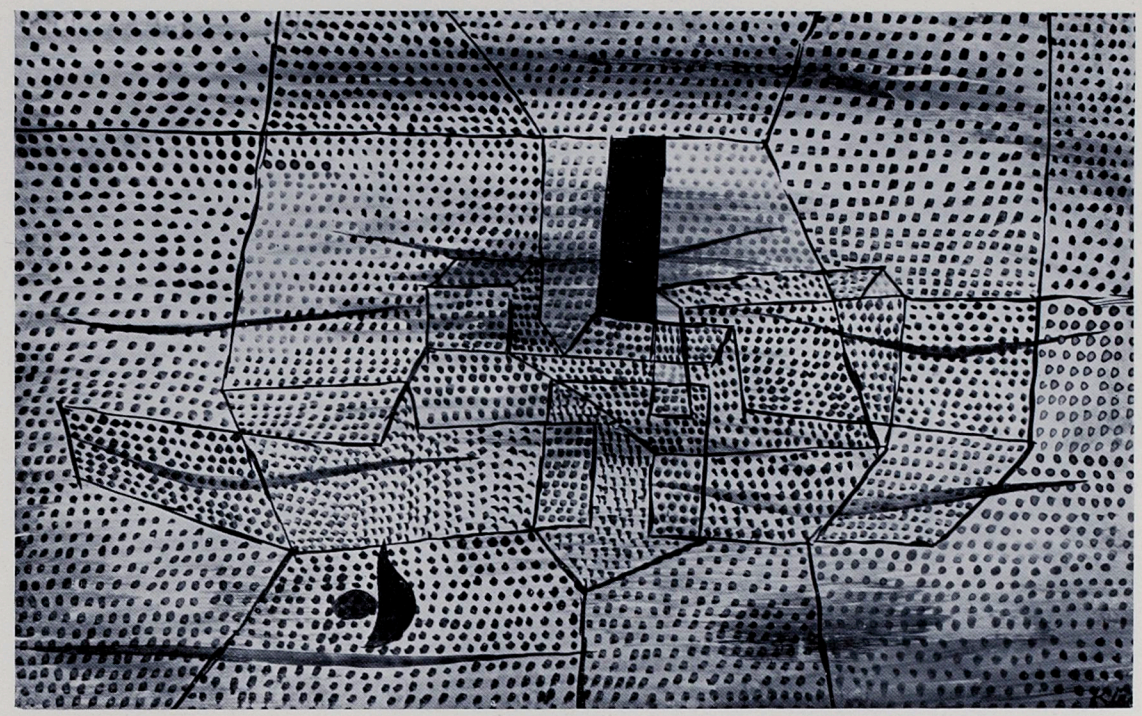
Some chapters of "Ueber das Geistige" have been published in Russian and Japanese.

KLEE AT BERNE

Paul Klee in the Berne "Kunsthalle" is an event. It is probably the finest and most comprehensive exhibition which Klee has ever had; even so, only works between 1919 and 1935 are included. More than 250 works, 110 paintings and about 150 coloured drawings (many of which are almost like paintings) fill the two floors of the building. It is a pity that the early works are missing, for nothing would prove the originality and consistency of Klee's work so clearly as its steady development since the very beginning, about 1900. But as every exhibition has to keep within certain limits, the mature work of the painter could only be covered in this way. The year 1919 actually provides a break. It was then that Klee, up to then a miniature painter of very great importance, changed to oil-painting, to canvas. With the change of format came a change of mentality. The unconscious and the supersensuous, from the very beginning an integral part of his painting, combines with empiricism and reason to make an exceptional unity. It is a graphic, visual and controllable unity, for what is the use of any artistic gift, unless it works with clear means of expression. For thirty years Klee has been putting all his strength into the exploitation of those means, with the result that to-day he can paint almost anything, not only facts, but also processes, inner complexes, any number of modes of consciousness.

What can the ordinary lover of art make of a picture called "Angel becoming," or "Aviatic evolution," or "Anguish," of a "Polyphony" or a "Magic Mirror"? Nothing. But Klee paints it so convincingly that picture and title are identical, and as in music the possibility of ambiguity arises only when the onlooker does not use the title, or when he sees something else. There is a secret hidden behind all art, that cannot be put into words; titles, just as headings of poems, are indications, nothing more, but with Klee actually indications, like the signs in his pictures.

Klee has invented a great number of such signs, and they become more and more expressive. In the beginning they consisted of letters, arrows, crosses, stars, exclamation marks and so on; later on, fragments, combinations of different dimensions, such as those of time and space, of psychological and cosmic events, crossing of heterogeneous species, such as those of man and plant, of the organic and inorganic. And finally form with Klee became self-creative, like the formal conception in Mozart, for instance. That is to say,



KLEE. Ancient Monument to a Ship. 1931.

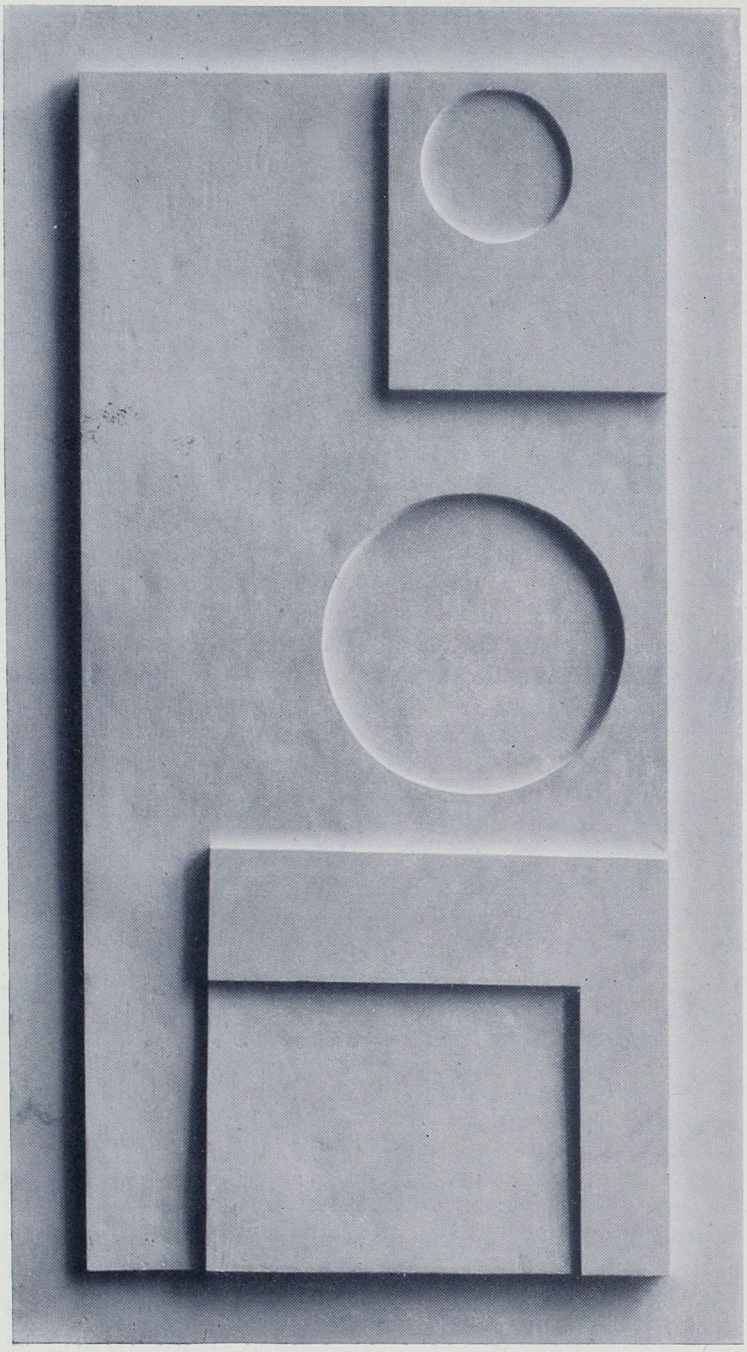
Klee works freely with the elementary means provided by his art ; a something comes into existence and at a certain point he suddenly realizes where it is leading to ; he goes for it and works it out. A form or a something arises that cannot be compared to reality. Such a reality sprung from form can be developed and new facts and processes arise again and again. As soon as one leaves behind the standard of natural fact innumerable possibilities of realization appear, which, once they have been put down by the artist, can be tested by the eye.

In spite of that, there would not be any great art if Klee were not also creative in technique. Not everything could be expressed with the old techniques. Klee invents new ones. He mixes gypsum, sand or chalk into the pigment or the ground, he combines oil and water colours, he varnishes, sprays and sticks on, he scrapes and scratches off, bits of cloth are attached where necessary, and so on. But often too, we have plain canvases or sketches and they are sufficient, for the variety of material used depends on the intention of the work.

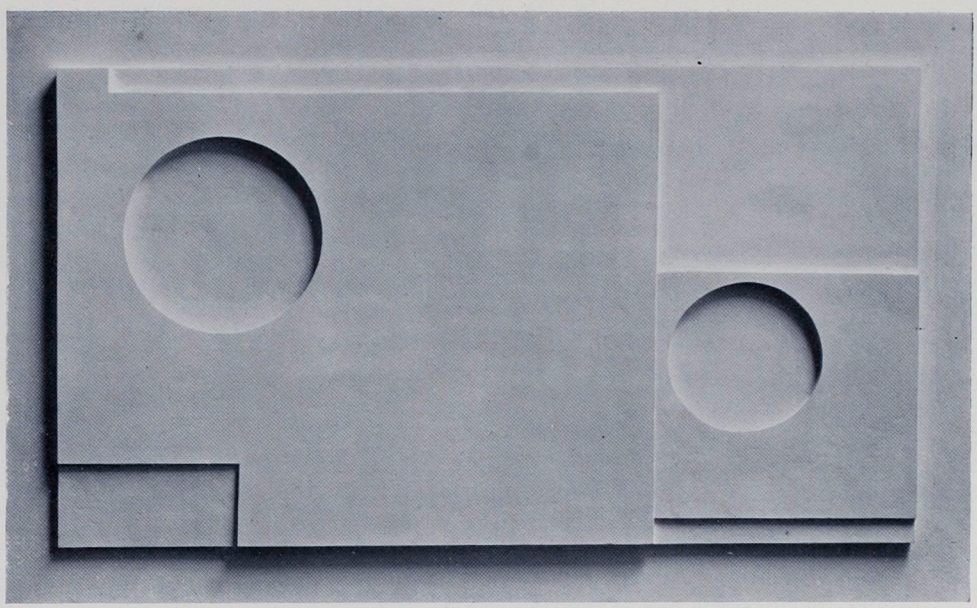
The exhibition starts with " Stage Scenery," " Kiosk," " Feast of the Asters " (about 1920), a fantasia of the unconscious, of an extreme beauty of colour, works which by to-day have become famous. The " Assyrian Play " of 1923 is already a magical mosaic ; the " Perspective Figuration " (1925) is an example of musical influence like the later " Polyphony." The years onwards from 1930 are the most fruitful. The enormous number of inventions of creative means in Klee can be watched through the pictures of this last period. And not one of those inventions disappears again ; they all hold their own and unite with earlier or later ones. There are kite-like inventions which illustrate fall, rise and suspension ; inventions of spatial depth and of plastic volume which surpass illusionism, classical rhythms as in " Resting Sphinx," and protuberant explosions of colour as in " Figure of the Eastern Theatre " ; physically dynamic shapes as in " High and Deep " and others which are sprung from psychoanalysis, as in " Dread." Finally a simple spiral line grows into a weirdly impressive " Mask of a Woman." There is no theory, but material perception and plasticity everywhere. That is the greatest thing in Klee ; far from being narrow-minded, he lets things in him and around him have free rein ; he respects their inner life and at the same time the central urge to form is always visible.

The impression of the exhibition is overwhelming. Even the sceptic has to give way to so much ability and such a great accomplishment. Again Klee proves to be one of the few who have given a new life to art and a new aspect to our time.

WILL GROHMANN.



BEN NICHOLSON.
Carved Relief. 1935



BEN NICHOLSON. Carved Relief in Wood. 1935

BEN NICHOLSON'S RECENT WORK

Once an artist—an artist of any kind, poet as well as painter, or even a pastrycook—finds his public, there is a great temptation for him to remain static. It is more than a temptation ; it is a line of least resistance. For the public, having made its conquest (and in the case of modern painting it is a hard-won battle), feels entitled to a little intellectual peace. It only asks the artist to go on repeating himself—producing exactly the same kind of picture to suit the new extension of sensibility. The history of art is full of these melancholy figures—successful artists, but successful in a special " line " ; who only at the cost of their livelihood, dare to depart from the line, to experiment, to advance into new territories of sensibility. They are not successful artists so much as successful business men ; they have become part of the " trade," willing underlings of the dealer and his patrons. But the sign of an independent artist—an artist with at least the potentiality of greatness—is that he refuses to submit to such bullying. Indifferent to wealth, to social success, to the taste of his patrons, he follows the dictates of his own creative impulse ; and only on his death-bed makes his last experiment.

Ben Nicholson has more than once shown this disconcerting restlessness ; this dissatisfaction with his own past achievement, this ever-present desire to use one style as a stepping-stone to the next. The changes are no doubt partly due to external influences —to the knowledge, that is to say, which he derives from the experiments of his contemporaries ; that, again, is a sign of the potentially great artist (recall the Delacroix-Constable episode). But the more significant changes are physical changes ; that is to say, they arise in the course of action, they are suggested by the way materials behave under the artist's hand.

Surface was always an essential quality in Nicholson's painting. In the first phase it was, as usual, a painterly surface ; an exploitation of the qualities of paint. Then he played with the idea of a diversity of surface qualities, for which he would bring in the aid of collage. But this was too easy a solution ; it was an addition to the original surface, not an exploration of that surface. The artist then began to scratch the surface ; to treat it, not merely as a *brushed* surface, but also as an *engraved* surface. In this manner layers of paint were revealed, one buried below the other. Against the soft rhythm of the brush emerged

the hard-*bitten* rhythm of the scoring point. The pictures were actually painted with both ends of the brush—the bristles and the sharp wooden point.

But this business of surfaces below surfaces must be explored more thoroughly. Why stop at surfaces indicated by layers of paint? Why not cut out, excavate, the very background of the picture? The flimsy canvas must be abandoned in favour of the wooden panel; but it is not the first time that the panel has been used in painting. It must, at the same time, keep within the limits of thickness we expect of a picture; otherwise, we have no division between painting and sculpture. Actually, there will be no division between this new kind of painting and bas-relief; but why should there be divisions between the plastic arts? Categories are for historians and critics, not for artists.

So Ben Nicholson began to vary the level of his painted surfaces; actually to cut out areas of the panel's surface at varying depths. These surfaces at varying depths made the pattern, the composition.

The first consequence was the discovery of the irrelevance of colour. The colour was in the depths. One depth against another gave the artist all the play of tonality he needed for his composition. A uniform surface paint of white or grey became the only necessary pigment.

The means, that is to say, became very simple: a counterplay of areas and depths, revealed against light. Like sculpture, a three-dimensional art. But unlike sculpture, a a three-dimensional art with one face. The composition changes slightly, subtly, as we move across the room. But there is no need to walk round the composition. It is not a composition in mass; but in opposed planes.

The nearest analogy is architecture: the façade. But not façades for a functional building—that was the baroque fallacy. Façades divorced from function. Free façades—that is the briefest possible description of Ben Nicholson's new works. But sometimes they remind me most of the ground-plans of Egyptian temples; no longer vertical façades, but area designs, at once logical and sensitive.

The public will soon fall for them; they are so clean and cool, and yet so alive. They need space and light; they cannot have too much light. They are the only kind of paintings that can look the sun in the face.

They are the best kind of painting to go with the new architecture. They will not look like antiques on the wall; they will not look *greasy* against the pure grain of plaster. They are integral with light and precision, with economy and cleanliness—with all the virtues of modern sensibility.

Ben Nicholson will not rest, even on this white crest. But we cannot guess what is beyond.

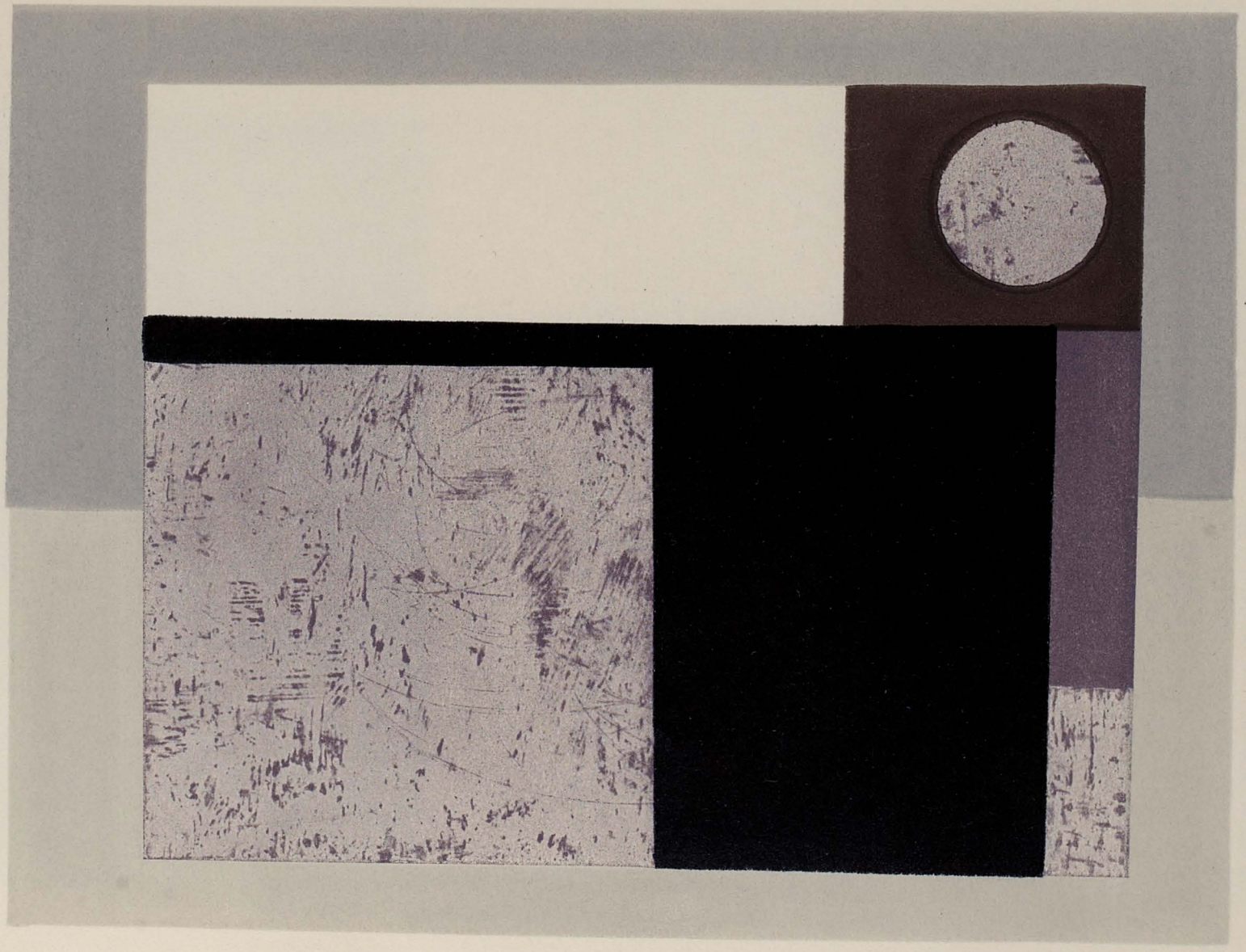
HERBERT READ.

ON BEN NICHOLSON'S RELIEFS

There is scarcely any task more thankless than that of speaking about abstract works of art; nothing affords greater opportunities for immense misunderstandings.

To begin with, one never knows whether one is speaking to people who already understand abstract art, or to those who must be won over to it, or even to those who haven't the slightest notion about any art whatsoever. Some historians of art belong to this third group. The company in which they find themselves is certainly not very distinguished, but for that reason all the more numerous. I myself once attended a course on the history of art, given by a learned professor who, for example, elucidated Menzel's "Frederick the Great's Round Table" by telling us the names of all the generals assembled there. I am certainly not a historian of art, least of all one of this type, and I am very unwilling to write about art. I prefer to look at it. However, being an infinitely polite person, I cannot refuse the request of the editor of AXIS, especially as it concerns the work of my friend Ben Nicholson.

Do you yourself believe that the third group distinguished above can ever be won over to Nicholson? I don't. These people are visually blind—un-visual—in the same way



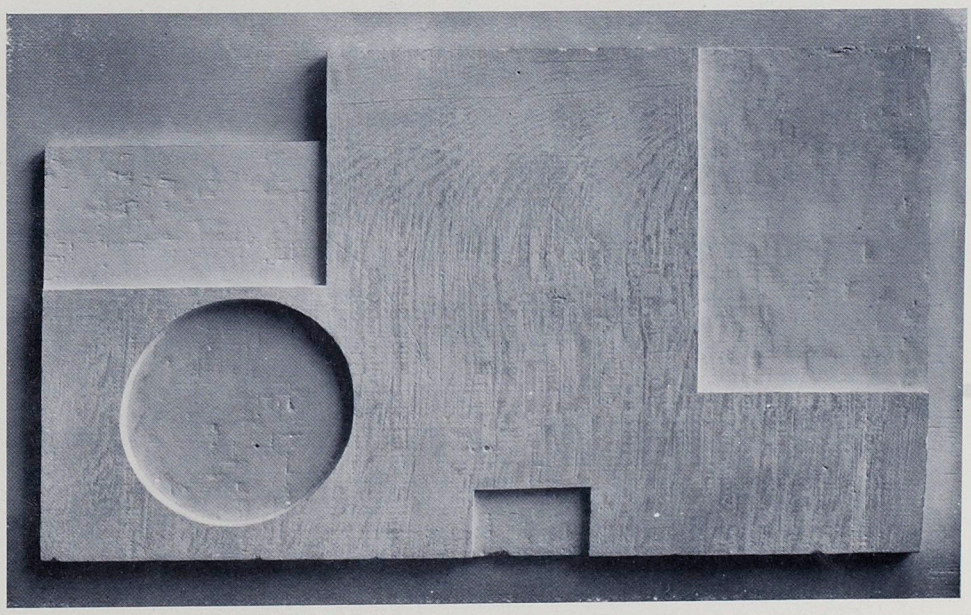
BEN NICHOLSON. Painting. (1935)

as there are many people generally recognised to be unmusical. As long as one can chatter amiably round the subject of art, just as my learned professor did about Menzel, these people will never notice that they haven't an inkling of what art is. But face to face with a Mondrian, this learned man will either become speechless or, if he speaks, offend people. For there is nothing that people hate more than having to admit their ignorance,—or better, their unseeingness. Nevertheless, lack of visual sensibility is something that, like every other incapacity, can be remedied—only most adults consider themselves too old to learn or unlearn anything, even when the reward is a new world of experience. Let us hope that among the thousands in this third group there are one or two who are not yet completely hardened and lost and are still capable of illumination.

There remains the second group, those who must be won over to abstract art. If these don't consider art and coloured photography as interchangeable, much may be hoped for. Nevertheless, there are many people who maintain, for instance, that they understand Klee and yet don't bring a glimmer of understanding to bear on the real abstract painters. Perhaps these over-emphasise the pleasurable aspect of art. When they really have to come to grips with a work of art, they give up. And yet in thirty years' time these same people will regret that they didn't immerse themselves in abstract art before.

Now for the first group, who already understand abstract art. These people, of course, know everything, so that there is really no need to say anything more to them. All the same, and at the risk of talking, like my professor, round the obvious, I will say what can be said about Nicholson's work—and first it must be looked at for a long time.

Nicholson first came to abstract art in 1933. This is all the more remarkable since nowadays the majority of painters who go through a " revolutionary " phase end up in " Neuen Sachlichkeit," surrealism or one of the day before yesterday's fashions in painting. Nicholson has developed his artistic understanding logically, and has freed the elements of his pictures more and more from naturalistic associations. His later abstract reliefs are well conceived and are related to Mondrian. Nicholson uses light instead of colour as the form-building element. Of course, others have done this before him (Hans Arp, Nicholaus Braun), but Nicholson, in doing it, has discovered a way of his own. Like all extremely abstract works, those of Nicholson only reveal themselves after being looked at for a long time. They do not have an instantaneous effect. But they are also not merely a means of

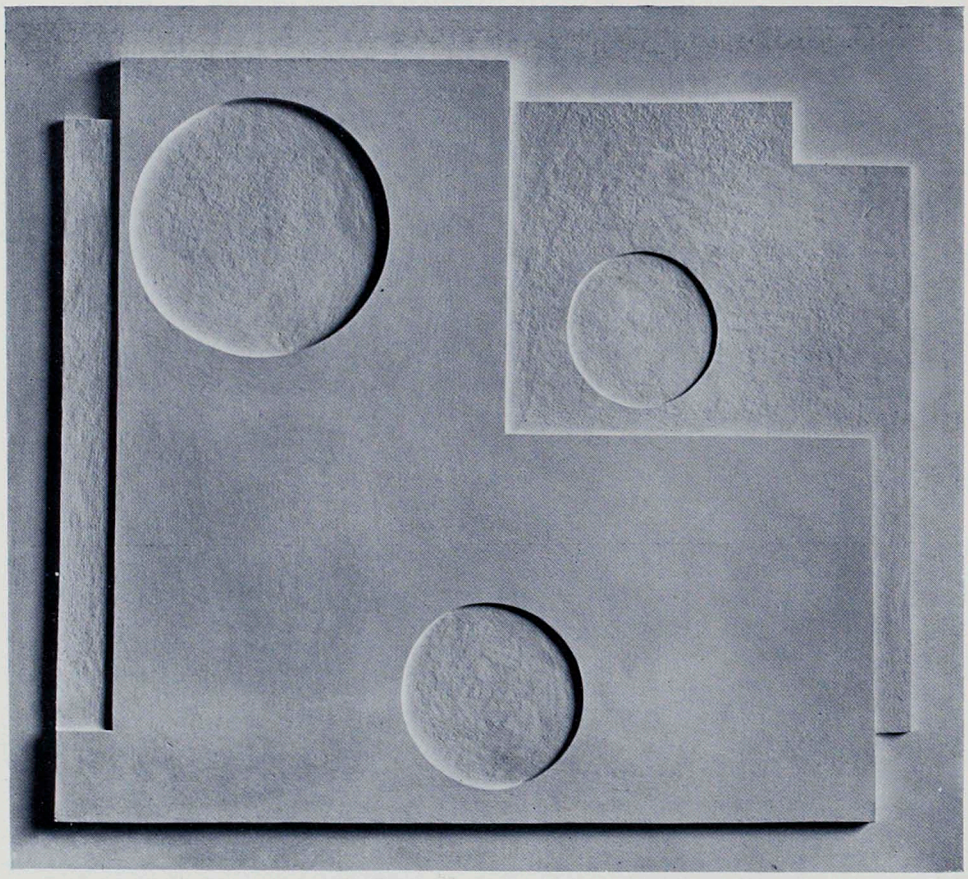


BEN NICHOLSON. Carved Relief in Wood. 1934

pleasure, like a Rembrandt, or even a Picasso, but an object of lasting personal discrimination, an element, like H_2O or N, which (to use Lissitzky's comparison) affects the whole of life.

Nicholson, to my knowledge, starting from comparatively rich forms has achieved a greater simplicity by diminishing the number of his formal elements, and has thereby immensely heightened the expressiveness of his work. I believe that if he progresses further in this direction he has much of importance to give us.

JAN TSCHICHOLD, Basle, April, 1935.



BEN NICHOLSON. Carved Relief. 1935

FROM REDUCTION TO GROWTH

One can work in his corner, silently, far from the artistic activity and its contradictions, ignoring it, only preoccupied with what he finds in himself, his particular ground. There can be masterpieces produced in any attitude when the artist goes far in his treatment of his initial material, when he achieves everything he proposes. But he proposes more or less. The degree of the definitive value of his works, besides depending on his own gift, is related to the quality of the attitude and the possibilities of growth of the elements used.

The work can be appreciated two ways ; accepting the particular position of the artist, his postulates and decided limitations, and judging his realisation within ; or, ignoring it and judging the work from no postulate, from no particular point of view, judging the position, the limitations, the elements as well as the realisation. The first way permits the finding of masterpieces in each tendency, because men everywhere have been doing their very best. The second way does not permit the finding of many, if any.

The milieu, atmosphere, particular reasons with which has been produced a Raphael do not exist any more, but when boldly comparing what I like best in the present-day works with a Raphael, trying to judge directly, accepting the comparison of all terms, the old one wins, by far.

I do not believe at all that we are, as men, or even craftsmen, inferior to the Renaissance people ; we probably spend more energy than they did, we may be more sincere and courageous, and I have a great respect for all the efforts and great interest for all the realisations of this century, even admiration ; I am in it myself ; I try, I hesitate, I suffer as all others. But here, I intend to get out of any furrow, to embrace the situation out of any particular focus, to face it ; I try to understand how, in spite of the elevation of the preoccupations of the abstract tendencies, their realisations are smashed by any Raphael or Poussin. Not a question of gifts and geniuses ; a question of attitude.

When painting after the appearance of nature, respecting its order, its obligations, any artist could be sure of being in contact with a thoroughly organised field. He was working upon an existing ground, fertile, ripe, up to his needs. He had a tradition well-established, that he enriched and transmitted.

We have been led out of this contact and this security. How can an artist of to-day, not following the controllable-in-all-points-appearance of nature, be sure of the fertility of his ground ? Sure that he is not going into a cul-de-sac, where all efforts will pile up, dry, and fall, where, if he ever becomes conscious of it, he will have to choose between going back, or polishing his deed and growing a peaceful stomach ? Or that the way he has chosen, or been led to, is not a narrow passage where most of his efforts will be spent in lateral frictions, slowing down his progress, absorbing his enthusiasm ? Two walls, ten walls, between which he will have, at last, to flatten himself, shorten his scope, in order to fit the local possibilities ?

Instinct is not enough, the task is too complicated, and experience, when everything is up to us, is too long and exhausting. Fault of any transmitted unity, we are obliged to take our own work of yesterday as a unity to measure to-day's. We have to be both judge and party. Thus the work becomes one-sided. Through lack of internal opposition, the works gain in qualities of realisation, but the conception is stopping, marking time and drying on foot. Interior arrangements, no building. Only those who are late seem to advance, because still following the tracks of the others.

By an interesting turn of spirit, this deformation of attitude is taken as principle. Artists look at once for a cul-de-sac wherein to build themselves a throne. In fact, the most technically perfected works, the most achieved works are now produced in the cul-de-sac position. When he reduces his preoccupation of development, the artist can gather all his efforts around his object. He feeds it as a definitive animal, serves it. He does not look out any more. He hammers it, adjusts it, polishes it. By insisting, by making his approach subtle, he brings up to its surface a certain representation of his own complexes and qualities. He enriches it. Thus the work becomes admirable, different, a case, a type. And thus loses all its qualities of fight, its indications of possible progressions.

Thus are monopolised definite points, different combinations, separated when not opposed to each other, with a definite handicraft attached to each. There are artists looking

in between for vacant locations in which to establish themselves for life. This attitude is professed, transmitted, followed.

Opposed to this is the jumping from one point to any other attitude, of which Picasso is the chief expression. Everything denied every day, recommenced ; a new point of view each time, a new technique even ; no tranquillity, no stagnation, no peaceful stomach ; he goes from abstraction to naturalism, from baroque to impressionism, from cubism to whatever he can invent. To the necessary reductions of the others, he opposes permanent additions ; to stagnation, life ; to formulas, permanent improvisation. But loses the deepening of each element, the fulfilment of everything proposed, the plenitude of the realisation, the strength of continuity. And this attitude is also professed and followed.

There is no tradition, but a number of recipes, mottos, accelerating, or slowing down, pushing or stopping ; a number of gestures, of private holes offering a different focus to sight. Facets. From each facet, the sky seems clear and certain, but the next facet destroys it. It is thus that people either enclose themselves on one only, or run from one to another without stopping. The situation would be endless if, after thirty years of astonishing activity, the field of research and contradictions was not about covered. Out of all the facets, a polygon appears. Every point of the surface of painting has been dug, every syllable of the possibilities of subject, right and reverse, has been isolated. Each means has been renewed, each notion upset, each traditional certitude contradicted. No more obligation of any sort, no likelihood, no order of appearance. The transparent mass of sky can be below, the heavy mass of earth piled on top, or there can be none. Everything is permitted, even going to sleep while working, the subconscious taking full care of the job. Artists have been hunting around for whatever new looking forms could be found. Some brought back roots, objects disintegrated by the sea, rolled stones, and followed or copied them. Some brought triangles, balls, embroideries, vectors, checkerboards, rectangles, parabolas and discs. Some went hunting over the palette and got spots, splashes of white, red, green and violet. They put mortar on the canvas, cork, newspaper bits, sardine tins, or hazard-torn-images ; post-cards showing smiling-by-the-hour-beauties, moustaches, bottles. Squatted on the remains of unsated youth, others got out of it wild lines, juvenile angers, thrashing abridgements. Others brought panes, screws, irons, bars, copper sheets, bulbs, wires, motors and photos.

Artists worked with all of that ; mixed, glued, screwed, painted, imitated, deformed, plastered, washed, combed, sandpapered, filed, demolished, polished, adjusted with rule and compass, or malaxed with fingers. Some sprinkling over, for an increased mystery, the disintegrated words of an unthought title ; others dressing over theories and mathematical looking definitions.

And hung it all on the walls.

Others, keeping in constant contact with the appearance of nature, made their job of massacring it, by colour blows, charcoal blows, glance blows, idea blows, brush blows, anatomising it, kneading its mass, keeping an eye on any lateral suggestion that might peep at a certain stage, and running into it head-first. The contact with nature happening only through memory, the remembered image used as others used the roots and stones and palette accidents. The free rebuilding of nature would be impossible while looking at it. But the remembered-in-all-order shapes of nature, shaken in the head, rushed with rediscovered instincts, hammered by every organ, every tool, the artist found in himself and out, finally flows upon the canvas : beaten, mortified, disintegrated, with no more vital obligations such as, for a living man, the need of a back-bone. No more one way of nature. The thing is like an anonymous prostitute. Will do anything. Take off its head and put a square instead. No matter what. Will stand it all.

The abstract attitudes, those born of former objects, and those purely invented, circulate between any recognisable forms. The motto is to avoid any resemblance. They somewhat occupy the intervals between objects, or the preliminary zones of generality, the period of the egg in which one cannot yet recognise the shape of the coming bird ; or the stage of the mathematical structures, the generalisation out of sight of the individual, their limit being any obvious contact with it.

All tendencies, research essays, mix. Hybrid combinations in all proportions are formed and grow branches. Considered without any chronological order, as a mass, the last thirty years constitute a continuous maze with thousands of keys. Different tendencies

emerge, but never freed from other influences, and they take more meaning when considered as reactions to others, than when taken separately.

Rag-picking, photographic imitations, wild demolition, ingenious combinations of unnamable elements, scientific mounting of materials, everything made with application, pain, hope, despair ; everything to be respected. All efforts have been sincere, even the dada jokes ; the artists made them the best they could conceive. Everything has been a useful and grave experiment and has, in that complex mass of activity, a precise meaning and function. Getting down to childhood, to all suggestions of the subconscious, emphasising the connections with science, the structure of events, even calculations, geometry, theories of colour and light, trying to localize hazards, composing all elements, renewing every mood of treatment, destroying the surface with nails and stones, or submitting everything to it, all of this has been going to every frontier of man, to the full man, dreams, vices, illusions included. The focus has been taken everywhere.

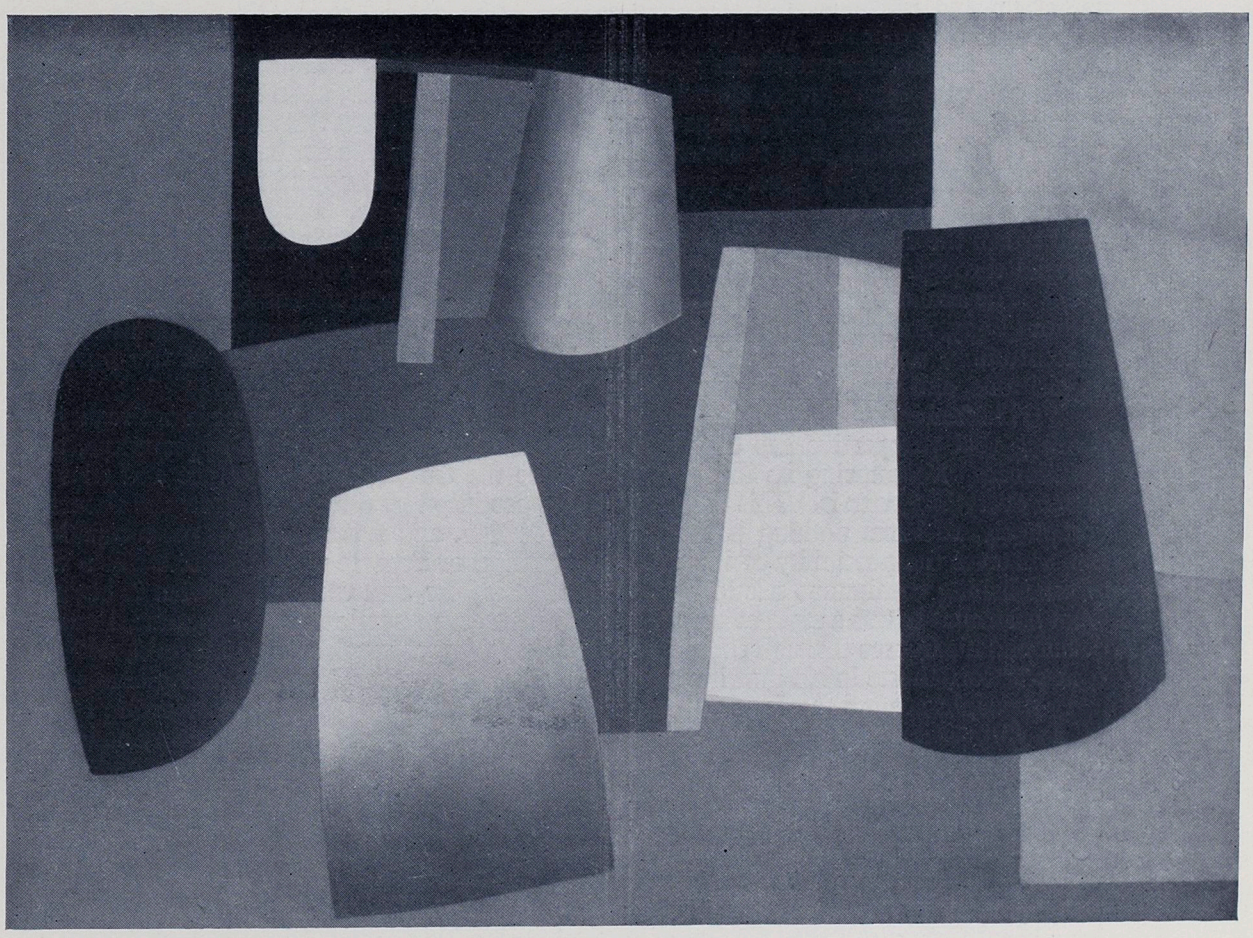
If, from the anarchy of the spectacle thus offered by the pictorial activity, one can see, over the heads of the individuals, a methodical experience of the full dimension of man-sight, it all becomes clear.

Every movement takes its real value. The purely reactive limitations appear. The real axis can be read.

. . . . .

Considering the totally abstract attitude in this light, it reacts against the freedom, or anarchy, of other tendencies. It offers certitude, order, clarity, but also extreme limitation.

As soon as an opposition, such as a curve against a straight line is used, a certain evocation of object is produced, and the generality is lost. As soon as colour quits the elemental points of the spectrum, however small the displacement, an evocation of light,



JEAN HÉLION. Painting. (Lucerne Exhibition, 1935)

that is to say a certain representation of a part of the world, is begun ; unavoidably. The only totally abstract position is that of Mondrian, orthogonal opposition of lines, relation of rectangles, tensions of elementary colours. Everything else is forbidden. However perfect and beautiful the works of the master of this attitude, however large his mind and his comprehension, the position is that of reduction of possibilities.

I, personally, owe a great deal to the influence of Mondrian, and I admire his works fully. His sign is like an essential knot, entirely authentic, controlled, solid, unified ; everything he proposes he completely realises. This is the maximum of abstraction, a definite point that will keep its importance in history, and there is still a great deal to be understood in what he did, without prejudice of what he will do. So this is not at all diminishing the importance of his contribution, but looking at the whole mass of production, I must state that his is the side of limited means and that, even if those means are used with the maximum of intensity, it amounts to a definite limitation of conception.

Its influence is obvious in all kinds of abstract tendencies, but rather the influence of its simplicity of aspect than of its essential structure. This aspect was logically determined through a long development, from a clear stage of the vertical cubism and its progressive purification and intensification. Its simplicity has been produced, not imposed. While it is the general tendency, now, to suppress the elements that do not look indispensable, or that could be replaced by simpler ones. On this course is lost the consciousness that many replacements bring shortenings and that essential terms are suppressed. Reducing the number of elements, eliminating what are called parasites, decorations, added stuff and so on, one also reduces the scope, the amount of meaning. One contents oneself with less. This lessening, taken as principle, is crowned with the title of concentration, but beyond a certain point, concentration becomes disparition. This is a unilateral attitude chiefly produced by the necessary reaction towards exaggerations in the opposite sense, by so many impressionistic movements.

It is true that new possibilities have replaced a certain number of suppressed ones, but most of them soon present new obstacles, new limitations. It is not enough to develop an element or a zone ; every element, taken as an aim in itself, soon reaches an end, and fattens or degenerates ; only groups of elements can grow. Each element presents a limited amount of possibilities, and those can only be multiplied by the evolution of the relations of different elements, by developing new internal and external oppositions. The elements grow out of the whole, and the whole grows out of the elements. They cannot be separated. Neither can the conception be isolated. It is the essential point of art to identify spirit and material through sight ; to create a continuity : man—fact—world.

The actual limitations result from considering the conception as an entity that exists without body, and can take one, or another later on. Reducing elements, in the search for concentration, unification has led to a diminution of the field of sight, of the possible oppositions, and thus, to a diminution of the pictorial conception itself.

The reduction never seems to be one, at first. It is in looking for more reality in painting that perspective has been denounced as a sterile imitation of appearances, and abandoned. Renouncing its illusion, one adores the true, touchable surface and tries to flatten everything into it. This flattening is also produced by the will to show the elements completely, to leave nothing behind, nothing hidden, and this is a high preoccupation. But whatever the possibility of illusion of it, Raphael or Poussin used perspective as a way of establishing continuous relations between what is here, and what is far, what is big and what is small. It was a scale of values ; and this has been overlooked. The same, Poussin developed his figures through the whole canvas, to show as much as possible, and, without contradiction, found in his drawing and modulations of colours, rhythms strong enough to carry the sight around the forms, to suppress the ignorance of the behind, to create in the head a full, acceptable figure. To call this an illusion would lead to calling every action of colours and rhythms on the eyes and the spirit an illusion, too. By those means, and many others, Poussin occupied space fully, without prejudice of working by planes and within planes. A little bit of a robe by Cimabue (I think of the Virgin and angels, in the Louvre) shows a comprehension of the division of surface in an open way that can be compared to many actual preoccupations. Of course, by bringing it to the first place, emphasising it, developing every possibility of this particular problem, taken as an independent one, we have been further in it than Cimabue. But he took it as a part and kept it in the range of its organic function, while we take it as an aim.

The question to decide is whether or not we go as far with our position as he goes with his position. When I compare one of the best works of to-day that I know, with that of Cimabue, I cannot doubt that Cimabue goes further, that his attitude embraces a much richer and more cultivated field, however deep our local efforts are.

No matter what is claimed to-day, our field is smaller, no matter what inventions, tricks of technique, emphasis on materials, on their treatments, no matter what machineries, new aspects and new constructions. Our means are not continuous, they are contradictory, they fight each other.

All the parts of a living organism, though indispensable, cannot reach the same degree of importance : they must keep connected in the process of development, but do not develop the same. There are simple cells, and all degrees of multiplication of these cells, until a complex organ, each of those degrees presenting a different figure, a different stage. Ignoring this, one more reason for emphasising the surface in painting has been the belief that all elements should be equally important, all in the first place, all at the same time. There are ways to establish a " surfacial " rhythm, but its necessary contradiction, the rhythm of age, from one cell to a complex organ, is thus absent. And it is that rhythm, from simple to complex, that produces a picture, a sensation of time, that is to say, a sensation of space. This is true for forms as well as for colours. Lacking this progressive rhythm the pictures are stacatto. We jump from one element to another, we do not pass.

The participation of the appearance of nature, and all its illusions may have been chosen for reasons we discard now, such as the narration of a story, but it assured a plenitude, a continuity of elements, of relations, in all directions. This was its chief function.

Poussin's Eliezer and Rebecca is still legible to-day because faces, gowns, landscapes, were used as bearers of rapports, multiplying the relations, developing their quality, intensity, oppositions to the maximum. Not the maximum of one or two oppositions, but the maximum of all conceived oppositions. This is where concentration takes its full meaning. Concentration of a being in growth. Fundamental opposition. The same, simplicity has no meaning except when applied to a complex organism. Simplification must be obtained on the way to growth, as a stage of that growth, instead of being obtained on the way to reduction, by suppression.

Our means are too limited ; our points of view too focused, we have our eyes too near what we do. Most of our efforts are absorbed by friction. Art will grow again when we shall have easier means, more of them, though fully controlled, when our attitude will be wider and higher, simultaneously. We have to get out of the specialised shops, and rediscuss, recontrol everything from the beginning.

. . . . .

These judgments on abstract art do not prevent me from being sure that it is the most authentic, the most progressive of this time. It was historically produced and fully necessary, and it is still the strongest movement. By dropping all its lessons and diving back into the naturalistic attitude, painters lose every benefit of it. My criticisms could not be used by the painters who carefully turned around it, picking here and there little elements of it, never getting into it, but prudently keeping within eye-reach of the common spectator. They still have to go through its purifying and concentrating lesson.

There is no way back. I am referring to a new attitude. From all the efforts and achievements of the time, must be redeemed the resulting force, the contradictory terms reducing each other. The mass of those efforts of thirty years must be understood and solved.

This is a complicated operation that cannot be made suddenly ; a confrontation of all terms, all degrees, of all positions, with permanent reference to all steps of the past and to our own steps ; a slow process of assimilation, correction, and digestion, of which will be capable only supple, patient minds ; humble enough to accept the rediscussion of the painfully got certitudes, and proud enough to think it worth while.

There must be woven a web, a woof, defining a legible continuity in all directions of the whole history, including those thirty years of contradictions and hazards. There must be conceived a tradition including Raphael, as well as the Cubists and Mondrian, so that their individual lesson can help us, without bringing us non-soluble contradictions. Here is the difference between what would be a sterile return, and what can be a definite progress.

Easy certitudes are the apanage of primary steps. Art, as man himself, is in permanent work, never in a definitive state. I am against any tendency leading to

definitive forms, of taboos of any sort. Nothing is ever sure in itself. No local principle can be permanent. The reality varies with the degree of the conception. The field of possibilities must be kept wide open. It has been a mistake of our time to make art resemble the formulas got out of it. It is through an authentic development that art has reached an abstract form, but the fact " abstract " cannot be taken as principle, or aim. It is the aspect of the realisation, a consequence of the degree of conception, a certain stage of evolution. I have not used any element of naturalistic origin (consciously, at least) for many years, and I do not see how I would, but I say No to nothing in advance. It is the best I can conceive now and the best I can do. A further degree of comprehension might change this. It is not the result of a decision, but that of a process still in action.

It is necessary to remove taboos of any sort, though keeping an axis of progression ; to constitute paintings, like beings whose term can develop infinitely, where everything remains possible, instead of paintings where more terms become forbidden as we go on.

The work considered as an organism in growth.

As much as possible got out of the canvas, as well as out of the artist. More, instead of less.

Developing and concentrating, at the same time.

JEAN HÉLION.

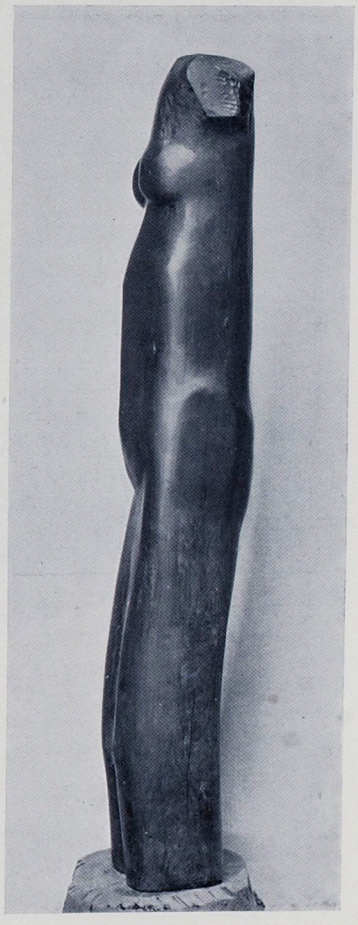
SIR MICHAEL SADLER'S COLLECTION

Sir Michael Sadler's house at Headington, near Oxford, is a charming setting for pictures and sculpture. It is full of possibilities : spacious, old, and not too formal. The collection has the one essential quality of apparent impermanance and change. There is nothing of the museum about it : no suggestion that anything is there for ever, but a hint that everything is there on sufferance, only so long as it continues to please. The pictures are arranged, that is, for enjoyment rather than for instruction. It would be possible to satisfy many prejudices by dwelling on one part of the collection alone. There is, for instance, a magnificent collection of Constable sketches, and beside them a fine series of early-English water-colours, including examples by Samuel Palmer, Girtin, Cox, de Wint and Turner of Oxford. Also a number of drawings by Cotman of old churches in Norfolk, which he has infused with so much feeling that they develop almost human characters and differences under his pencil.

Owing to its personal character the collection provides a valuable opportunity of seeing unusual things side by side : of comparing, for instance, a magnificent medieval French *Virgin and Child* with a varied collection of primitive sculpture. One feels that every picture and piece of sculpture that Sir Michael has acquired he has acquired because he appreciated and needed it, and since he has a remarkable flair and has built up his collection gradually over a period of many years it includes early works by many now well-known living artists done at a time when they were little known in this country. He was buying pictures by Kandinsky twenty years ago, and has some very fine early water-colours (including the one reproduced on page 9). The modern paintings range from Bonnard to Klee and Picasso (there is a fine early-cubist period portrait, and the *collage* seen on page 26). There are pictures, too, by Monet, Gauguin, Segonzac and Braque.

The works by modern English artists have been chosen with the particular intention of showing the parallel development of English and French painting. There are early works by Lewis (1915) and Wadsworth ; and of a later date representative paintings by Wadsworth, Nicholson, Nash, Hitchens, Roberts and many others. Henry Moore is well represented by a number of drawings for sculpture and several carvings, one of which is set out of doors on the grass surrounded by flowers and trees—one of the few examples of contemporary sculpture which has an out-of-doors setting in this country, another being the large carvings by Zadkine in Edward Wadsworth's garden in Sussex.

SCULPTURE IN SIR MICHAEL SADLER'S COLLECTION



1. *African Mask.*
2. *HENRY MOORE.*
   Reclining Woman.
3. *Another View.*
4. *BARBARA HEPWORTH.*
   Carving in African blackwood.
   1932

PICASSO. Still-life. 1914. (Coll. Sir Michael Sadler)

THE LUCERNE EXHIBITION

THESIS—ANTITHESIS—SYNTHESIS. Art Museum, Lucerne. 24th February to 7th April, 1935

The simultaneous exhibition of cubist, surrealist and abstract works of art needed a clear and easily understood arrangement both for the sake of the museum and for scholastic reasons, especially since this show was out to be instructive.

The title, " Thesis—Antithesis—Synthesis," drew immediate attention to the dialectic viewpoint and the attempt at the same time to estimate artistic production as an expression of the present state of society. If the title at the first glance appeared distinctly dangerous and pedagogic in its idealogy, experience brought contradictory evidence.

In the Entrance Hall Cézanne and Van Gogh are contrasted as the most outstanding figures of the past century, and the direct benefactors of the cubist synthesis.

In Room A Derain's and Picasso's " Heads " and earlier works provide the connection with the visual tradition : Braque's exhibits, a sequence of classical still-lifes of the years 1910–30, give proof that his pictures represent less a psychological state than a static, a traditional order ; while Picasso's " Tête " (1907), " Portrait de Femme " (1911), " Nature Morte " (1913, 1925) and " Métamorphose " (1929) seem spontaneously vital announcements, when their Spanish ochre-orange power is compared with Braque's silver-cool " æsthetic." Gris, represented by productions of 1916, 17, 19, 20 and 23, appears characteristically beside Braque and Picasso as the most synthetic of the three.

Léger's easel pictures in Room B become, as pictures on the wall, part-organisms of the architecture. They are the consequence of a confession of cubism, and the first experience to be given a pictorial shape of the world-substance of technics. In the earliest works of Léger's series (1922, 25, 27, 31, 34) some parts of the pictures form separate organisms, without losing the direct inter-relationship with their plastic surroundings. In Chirico's " Gare Montparnasse " (1914), however, the irrational dream-state hides itself under the cubist surface-structure, while it concerns itself on the other hand with historic associations in " Gladiateurs en repos " and " Gladiateurs s'entrainant " (both 1928).

Room C. Ozenfant's rational " Dorique " (1926) could be taken as the prototype of puritan painting. Miró, from the same period, makes unconditional claims on psychological states and uses them as a sound foundation. An early work, " Nature Morte," with fish and poultry (1920), faces Léger's " Paysage " (1933) in Room B, while the large-scale " Peinture " (1933) hangs in Room E between Fernandez and Hélion. With Klee it may be expected that oddities in structure perceived by the eye become the inducement and material of a dream-reality ; in an exhibition there is a contrast, from the formal point of view, between inuitive pictures on the one hand and constructive pictures on the other.

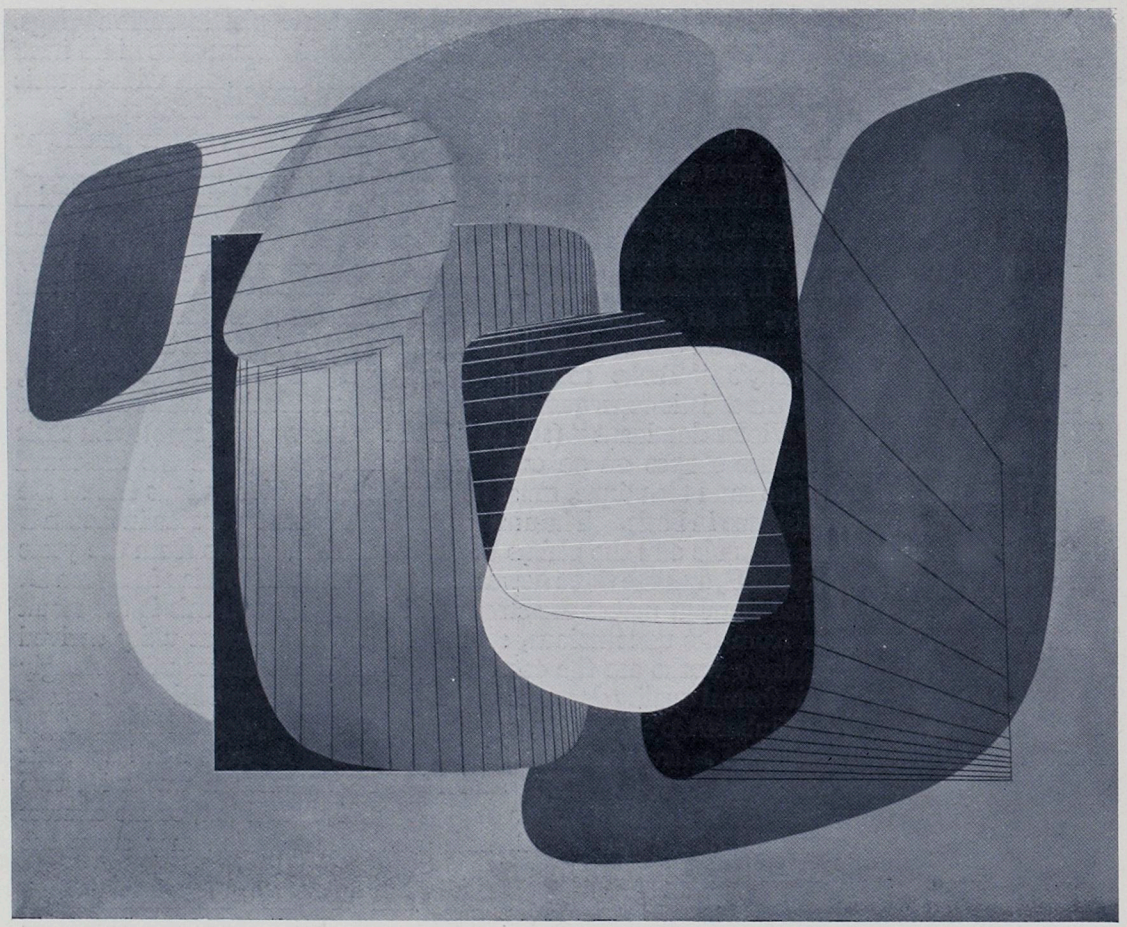
Room D. Kandinsky's " Tache rouge " (1921), " Ligne traversante " (1923), " En noir " (1924), express the artistic consequence of a known state of mind, while the works " Monde bleu " (1934), " Violet dominant " (1934), " Deux entourages " (1934) with their delicate, pale-coloured surface shapes on an even, clear background, and the flat-toned pictures carried out in a fine sand technique, must be considered as illustrations full of the meaning of his present existence in Paris. The arrangement of the earlier works in Room B was decided on idealogic grounds and the claims of the exhibition, works from the years 1923 and 1924 being in Room E, and the three newer works opposite Mondrian in Room D. In Ernst's works the lyrical element makes the strongest impression, and this is the result sometimes of apparitions from the unconscious, sometimes of the apparent unity derived from surface charm. Paalen's works are the connecting links in the career of a strongly developing searcher : their formal quality does not appear to penetrate convincingly through the surrealist tendency. Täuber-Arp's grouped, or but slightly-altered, repetitions of single forms are the natural results of a development which makes possible wide and important solutions. Mondrian's function is fixed in this exhibition in a structural way with two aspects : with the summing-up of the last remains of the figurative tradition, of the clearest abstraction ; and the creation of an impersonal, bare architecture which may serve the new generation as a basis for further organic creation.

Room E. Fernandez' " Hommage a Grünewald " and " Pegase " are convincing on account of the solidity of the pigment and their formal worth which, however, threatens

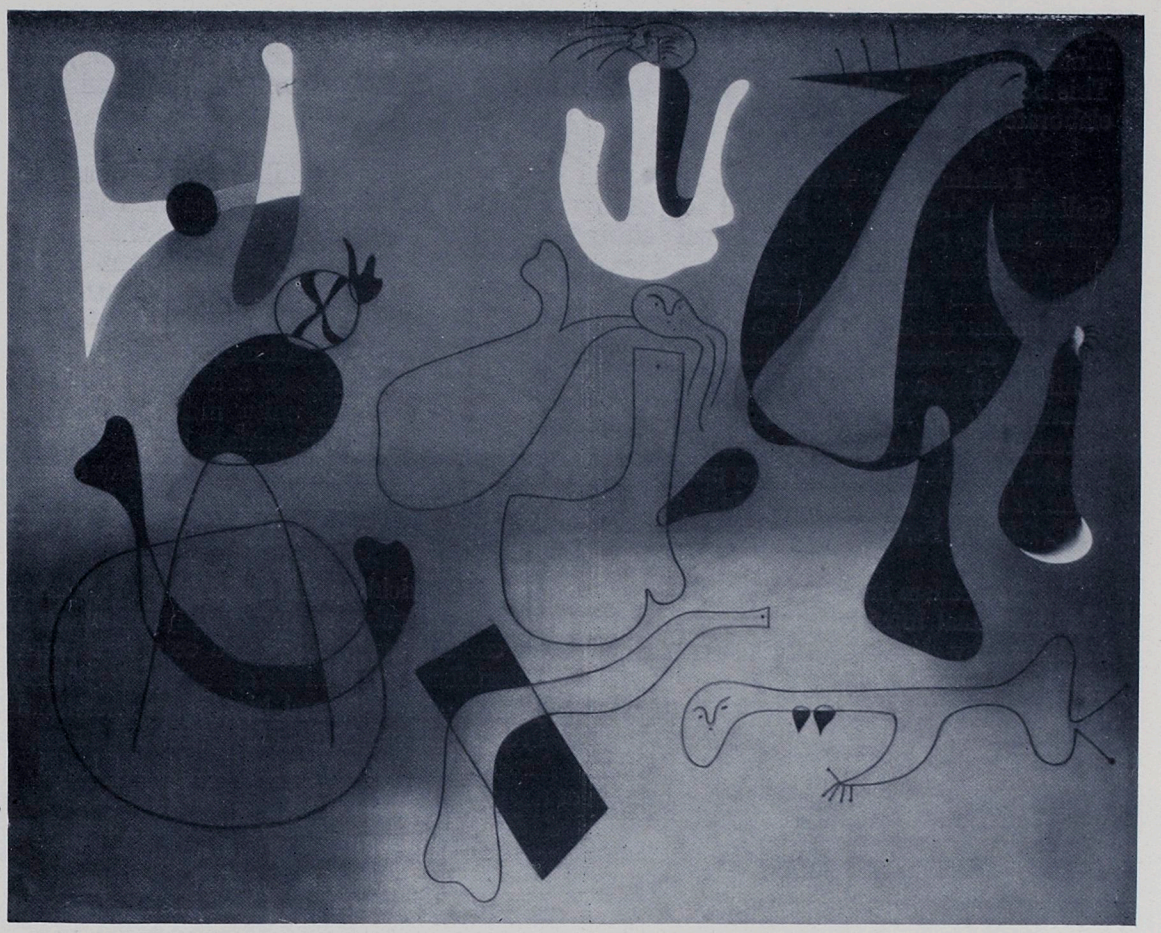
to outweigh the spiritual accent. The very discovery of cubism, its place, its function, produced an increased intensity, which Hélion tries to express as a development of Mondrian's formal concept partly by means of tremendous pictures. The six exhibits, " Peintures," from the years 1933–35 show the direction of his rich pictorial experience to the realisation of the deep influence of colours conditioned by optical impressions. Erni tries in his exhibits to group plasmoid and crystalloid natural forms from related pictures around one or more balancing points, and out of these shapely masses and their constellation an inner tension and a static form result.

In Room F, the Sculpture Room, we first meet the oxidized metal sculpture of Gonzalez, which stands out against the surrounding objects as a romantic nodal point. " Concretions humaines " in plaster, four exhibits of Arp's of the year 1934, express themselves as originally organic materialistic poetry in connection with undoubtedly psychic contacts. Giacometti's crystal-like plaster mass has such an important, vital bearing, that the thing conceived separates from the material. The two " Têtes " are finely balanced and held between the planes of each separate surface. The basis created by Mondrian is used by Nicholson as a starting point for his reliefs. Circle sections and right-angles are raised on different levels, the sectional lines of which are always cut at right-angles to the picture-plane. Calder's " Mobiles " show finely-balanced movements of wires and spheres which express new unities in every investigation. Their dynamic quality accentuates the present-day acceptation of life. The arrangement of the sculptures gave the visitor an opportunity of weighing up Arp's, Giacometti's and Nicholson's achievement in the best conditions of light.

HANS ERNI, Lucerne.



HANS ERNI. Composition C. 1934. (162/130 cm.) (Lucerne, 1935)



JOAN MIRÒ. Painting. 1935. (175/195 cm.) (Lucerne, 1935)

LONDON SHOWS

E. McKNIGHT KAUFFER, IVON HITCHENS, JACOB EPSTEIN, CURTIS MOFFAT

McKnight Kauffer presents himself in all his versatility at No. 12, Bedford Square. He shows illustrations that border on Cocteau, outlined hands almost drawn by Picasso, shades of the mysterious naivety of Christopher Wood and posters that are uncompromisingly McKnight Kauffer. Toying with art pure he produces merely a competent pastiche, a summing up of the appearance of modern art, uninteresting because unnecessary. His posters are vitally interesting and vitally necessary; they exist as works of art because they fulfil a function, they are disciplined by a set of laws contained in themselves, and there is no pandering to a fictitious æsthetic snobbery. The limitations of commercial art provide the material for its existence. Three colours and a certain amount of information about the air-mail service, induce a statement ravishingly attractive offered with consummate grace and skill, satisfyingly adequate. Crippling limitations imposed by employers have nothing to do with the innate law of poster making. No. 4, *Window Bill for Gilbey's Invalid Port*, is a sad affair of grapes and an air brush, while No. 19, *Project for Large Poster*, proves superbly, although advertising nothing, McKnight Kauffer's genius for advertising.

. . . . .

The Mayor Gallery shows a masquerade of easel pictures in the form of photography by Curtis Moffat. The exhibition is impressive as a display of energy, but energy misplaced. A world of thought, care and apparatus seems to have gone into the adaptation of a photograph into a painting; the result is a fool-proof Royal Academy standard that somehow is a little less satisfactory than the Royal Academy. To employ a medium that is alive with its own potentialities, to achieve an end that is already realised, is a waste, a

superfluity, rather like the training of circus horses to walk on their hind legs. Curtis Moffat has reached the peak of artificial reality in the photography of some of his objects. This he has illogically destroyed by printing on a varnished canvas surface, and framing in elaborate plaster.

. . . . .

Painting as painting is to be seen in the Ivon Hitchens Exhibition at the Lefevre Galleries. There is no parallel to photography, or to the equally mechanised process arrived at by purely representational painting. The exhibition has a peculiar enchantment, the work itself recreates its surroundings to a unity that woos the spiritual senses. Ivon Hitchens has almost defined loveliness, but he seems never to have experienced the disillusionment that leads to intense normality, and is essential to the completion of æsthetic experience. Composition implies the capacity for addition, subtraction and multiplication, a series of numbers each as a perfect unity capable of arrangement into a greater unity. In Ivon Hitchens' paintings there is a simple unity merely, a vision materialised spontaneously. The colour glides enticingly over the surface of the canvas, but the onlooker is allowed no pause for reconstruction or speculation. The show forms a line of beauty, none of the paintings has failed, and two of them, *Coast Plantation*, No. 13, and *Ashdown Forest*, No. 17, are exceptionally satisfying.

. . . . .

Surrealism has found devious routes to the nerves, tickling them to a state of torture. This irrational lopsidedness is as destructive of æsthetic value as the equally unbalanced intellectuality that it sets out to neutralise. The contact made between a complete work of art and the onlooker is intense, so that these specialised oppositions are really irrelevant, but the intensity of the artist's conception may have an intellectual bias or an emotional one. Painting or sculpture in the last century in England reached its lowest ebb ; drained of emotional and intellectual power it had deteriorated into a mere household hobby. The influence of an artist like Jacob Epstein at the period that was the tag-end of decadence, was shattering and constructive, and he justified himself by using swiftly any means to revive the corpse. His enormous carving that has been on show at the Leicester Galleries has at last established him as a popular idol. It fails deplorably in every way, deplorably because Epstein as an artist has been so much more important than that particular work. As carving proper it fails, it is an ineptitude, a façade hacked out of stone. It is large, not in conception, but through the chance of physical dimensions. It might, in fact, have been the size of a mantlepiece ornament, as it is it would be a suitable adornment for a skyscraper. Its tragedy is the tragedy of the Christianized negro. The aim, glimmeringly perceptible, of expressing profound human emotions has been abortive. The African Primitive has degenerated into the pious Uncle Tom. Epstein has some bronzes on view that are a far juster summary of his achievement ; he has worked through his uncertain violence to the achievement of a sound and precise portraiture.

EILEEN HOLDING

RECENT BOOKS

Plastic Redirections in Twentieth-century Painting. By JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY. (Published for the Renaissance Society of the University of Chicago. Gt. Britain, Cambridge University Press.) 7s. net.

This book is a useful summary of the painting of the last twenty years : open-minded, well-informed and reasonable. Mr. Sweeney is one of the few critics who do not believe that a return to naturalism must follow shortly. He chronicles movements tirelessly,—cubism, futurism, dadaism, surrealism,—and has an air of being ready for anything instead of tired of everything. His book in fact suffers from this over-docketing, and the tendency to find a place for everyone—the critic's preparation for heaven. But his prejudices are usually strong enough to shine through. As he says himself : " The only genuine creative criticism that exists in the plastic arts is a creative act which provokes or follows upon another creative act." And the creative act involves rejection. He has made an excellent choice

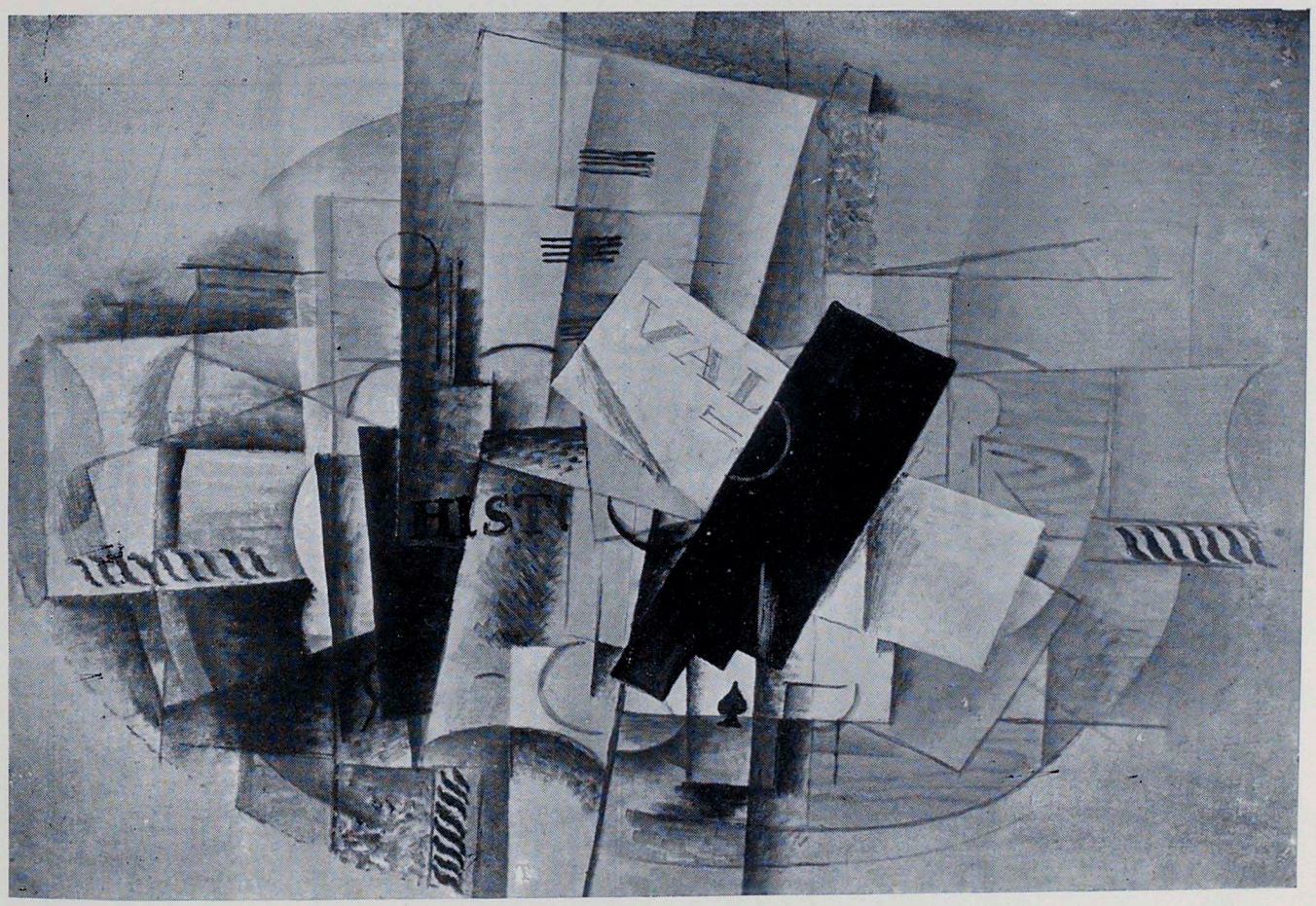
in the forty-six illustrations, ranging from Monet to Hélion. They suggest the nature of his fruitful prejudices well, and include nine Picassos, four Mirós, a van Doesberg and a Mondrian. Also a photograph from life of Pere Juniet and his family, cart, dogs and all, reproduced beside Rousseau's painting of them—a charming and instructive document.

The Modern Movement in Painting. By T. W. EARP. (Special Spring Number of *The Studio*, 1935.) The Studio Ltd. 7s. 6d. net.

Within its limits this is a charming picture book, and good value for money. Roughly, it covers the ground of the popular modern colour print. Its title is against it, since six of the fifteen painters represented are dead and of the remaining nine all but two are well over fifty. Except for a vague echo of surrealism in the last reproduction (Pierre Roy) there is nothing to suggest any movement in painting since a 1924 Picasso and a 1926 Braque. But these and the Derain and the Matisse are good to see produced in England in colour. The sixteen reproductions are on slips pasted on brown paper, which spoils the effect of some of them. They are all in colour. Most of them are familiar, but some of them are very successful as reproductions—notably the Seurat (*Le Pont de Courbevoie*), the Modigliani, the Rousseau (a charming *Landscape*) and the Braque. There is a long, modest, reliable introduction by T. W. Earp.

J. P.

A Circulating Library of Pictures has been started at Durham Wharf, Hammersmith, Terrace, W.6, by Julian and Ursula Trevelyan. Here pictures may be borrowed for a year for one or two pounds. The pictures are also for sale. This seems a very good scheme, especially if the emphasis is laid on ultimate sale, and ought to prove successful both for artists and the public.



GEORGES BRAQUE. Round table. 1911. (115/80 cm.) Exhibited at "Les Créateurs du Cubisme," 1935

PERIODICALS RECEIVED:

Abstraction Création Art non-figuratif. Cahier No. 4, 1935. (44, Avenue de Wagram, Paris.) 20 francs.
This includes a reproduction of a fine Kandinsky, and an unfamiliar Picasso (1927).

Gaceta de Arte, Tenerife. (Eduardo Westerdahl.).
The December, 1934, number reproduced two Kandinsky paintings and two Klees.

Il Milione. 38. Milan (Via Brera, 21).

Bulletin. Gallery of Living Art, New York University. February, 1935. Illustrates works by Arp, Mondrian, Miró and Léger.

● The article by Wyndham Lewis announced for this number will be published in a later number.

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